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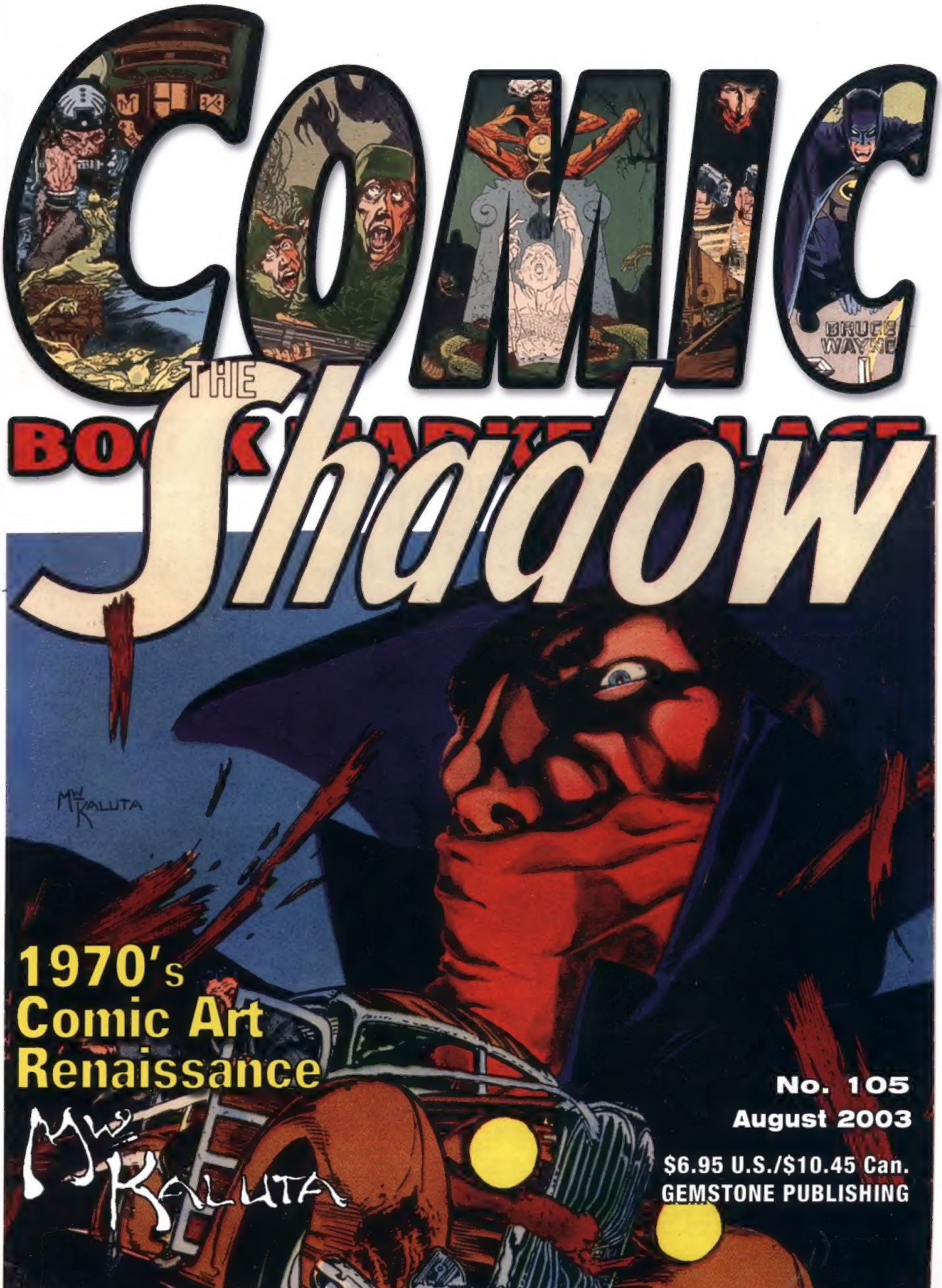
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Vol. 3
No. 105
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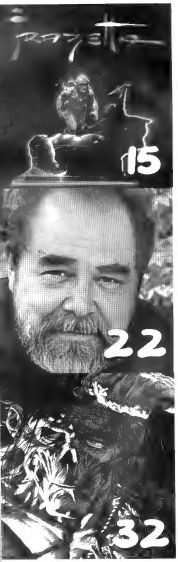
FEATURES



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COVERS:
Bernie Wrightson's Swamp Thing and Michael Kaluta's The Shadow
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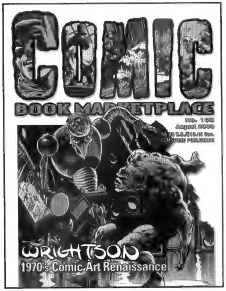

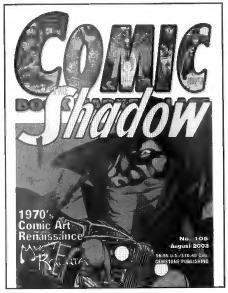

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The Young Turks

It was in the summer of 1968 or 1969, as I recall, when Phil Seuling held his annual July 4th convention in the old Statler-Hilton Hotel in New York City. I had started attending Phil's conventions a couple of years before that and was still absorbing this whole new (to me) phenomenon of comics collecting. I was still a professor at Drake University and chairman of the Physics Department there, and once or twice a year I would be able to get away to come to New York City to see Bill Gaines and Frank Frazetta and/or to attend one of Phil's conventions.

This was a few years before I had even considered publishing anything about comics. I was collecting EC comics and enjoying my friendship with Bill Gaines, and by this time I had met Frank Frazetta and visited him in his home several times, and I was a huge Frazetta fan, based upon the Ace paperback cover illustrations, the Burroughs Canaveral book illustrations, and his work for Jim Warren's *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines. I was rapidly losing interest in being a physics professor and gaining interest in doing something of an entrepreneurial nature that related to Frazetta and EC comics. Shortly after this, my Frazetta projects, like the hand-colored edition of *Weird Science-Fantasy* #29 cover, and my EC projects, like *EC Portfolio One*, got me started down that road and I have never looked back.

Anyhow, here I was in '68 or '69 at the Statler-Hilton when this young good-looking guy walks up to me and hands me a bunch of pages of original art to a story called "Uncle Bill's Barrel." He introduced himself as Bernie Wrightson, and his artwork knocked my socks off. It was like a combination of Graham Ingels and Frank Frazetta, I thought, and it was really, really good stuff. Instantly, I was a Bernie Wrightson fan. In fact, Bernie traded me the original art for that story for a couple of pages of Al Williamson art I had. A day or so later he came back to talk to me, having realized that the trade we made was not really a fair one, and asking me if I would consider un-doing the trade so he could keep his "Uncle Bill's Barrel" originals. I imagine he had talked to someone who had convinced him that I got the better end of that trade by far, and so we agreed to call off the original trade.

I then discovered that there was this group of "young Turks," I called them, who were all aspiring artists and had been knocked on their cans by looking at the same Frazetta art that had caught my eye. There was Bernie, Jeff Jones, Michael Kaluta, and a few others, all having been inspired by Frazetta and EC artists, and all starting careers as comic artists.

Possibly I am overstating the Frazetta influence on these guys, but I don't think so. None of them wanted to be Frazetta clones, and they all started to venture out in other directions like J.C. Coll, N.C. Wyeth and Arthur Rackham, but I think one of the strong forces that first drew them together was their mutual admiration for Frazetta's art, which was at a peak at that time.

It's hard to believe that this was 35 years ago! Wrightson, Jones, Kaluta, Frank Brunner, Bruce Jones and others from this brotherhood went on to become big names in the fields of comic art, illustration, and even concept artwork done for movies. But they are all younger than me and I still think of them as "young Turks," even though now they are the old-timers that are inspiring another whole new generation of comic artists.

Let's all raise our glasses in a toast to these artists who, initially inspired by Frazetta, have all gone off in their own unique directions, and to the next generation of "young Turks" which they inspire!

Russ Cochran
Editor and Publisher

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Art Director and Cover Designer

BILL BAKER
JENNIFER CONTINO
WILL MURRAY
MICHELLE NOLAN
MARK SQUIREK
MIKE WILBUR
Contributors

PRICING & MARKET REPORTS
ROBERT M. OVERSTREET
Senior Pricing Editor

MICHAEL NAIMAN
Market Reports Editor
mnaiman1@cox.net

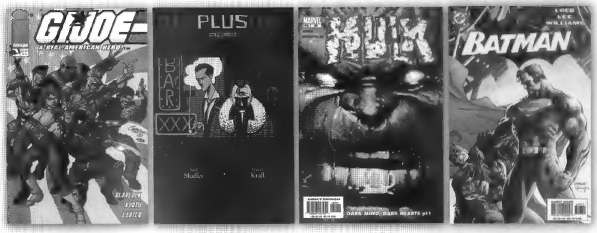
MARK HUESMAN
Pricing Coordinator
feedback@gemstonepub.com

ADVERTISING
ANGELA MEYER
Traffic & Operations Manager
ec@gemstonepub.com
Toll Free (800) 322-7978

BRENDA BUSICK
Creative Director
bbrenda@gemstonepub.com

RESEARCH
JOE McGUCKIN
mjoe@diamondgalleries.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE & ADMINISTRATION
JUDY GOODWIN
Customer Service Manager
cbm@gemstonepub.com
Toll Free (800) 322-7978
Or (417) 256-2224



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Marketplace Mail

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Fletcher, you betcher

In the caption (in "Nolan's Notebook" from *CBM* #101) to the Dell All Pictures Graphic Novel *Four Frightened Women*, the adaptation is credited to Robert Stanley. Stanley did the cover and posed for the Kent Murdock figure (his wife posed for the face over the left shoulder) but Richard Martin Fletcher did the adaptation drawn on 7x10 inch boards.

Fletcher had an interesting career working in strips and Golden Age comic books (creating the first super-heroine among other things) before a long stint on the *Jed Cooper* comic strip. The *Tribune* partially funded the *Four Frightened Women* book since he convinced them that he needed an assistant on *Jed Cooper* without telling them he was behind because of other freelance work.

While *Four Frightened Women* is scarce, the other All Picture Dells are even harder to find (depending on the checklist there are two or four total, I think. I've only seen three and I only own *Four Frightened*).

If you're interested in a short article on Fletcher, I did one several years ago for CFA-APA after Max Allan Collins turned over to me Fletcher's files bought in one of those odd deals in an Iowa corn field.

There were a few comics and a lot of newspapers. There were more comics including *Superman* #1 and probably other early *More Funs*. Unfortunately Fletcher stored them in barrels and when the roof leaked the barrels filled with water, and a whole lot of very fine condition books—probably a half million or more on today's market—turned to four-color sludge. Keep up the good work

George Hagenauer
Verona, WI

Yikes! Four color sludge! Now readers, learn something from this! Don't store your comics in barrels, and if you do, not rain barrels! Thanks, George!

Russ Cochran

I wrote the cutline, warning everyone here I didn't know what I was talking about. Michelle Nolan was unavailable to vet it, and shares no culpability. Thanks for setting me straight.

Ed Rock

Fair play

As a collector and retailer in the central/northern NJ area, I am very pleased to find an entry in your "Market Reports" by John Paul of Comic Book Expo. Any fan in our neck of the woods knows full well that there is a real dearth of worthwhile, local comic book shows. Yet the time, effort and positive attitude that John puts into his monthly Wayne and Clifton shows reinforces the maxim: Quality, not quantity.

While seekers of the dog and pony aspects of Wizard World might be disappointed, any lover of comics, be they diehard collector or casual reader, will be taken in by the outstanding selection at John's shows. From high-grade keys to bargain books, the overwhelming majority of the dealers that work John's shows offer a wide variety at reasonable prices, and with a friendly manner to boot.

John himself tirelessly works the room, greeting customers and dealers (usually he remembers everybody's name), enthusiastically running an auction at 12 noon that features items actually worth bidding on (including Golden and Silver Age; bidding starts at a dollar), and maintaining the casual, friendly atmosphere.

To those tri-state area fans tired of paying steep admissions for the privilege of enduring cutthroat prices and rude dealers at the big shows, I urge you to take the time to check out local ones that are all about fun and fair play. John Paul's Wayne and Clifton Comic Book Expos remember what it was like to first discover comics as a kid.

For that reason alone, it deserves the support of every area dealer and retailer, casual reader and high-grade collector.

Chris Eberle
WildPig Comics II
Kenilworth, NJ

Chris, this is the way comic conventions used to be back in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is great to hear that John Paul's shows are so user-friendly. CBM will send one of its chief spies, Harry Matetsky of Middletown, New Jersey, to one of John Paul's future shows to report on what he finds. He will be in disguise, of course.

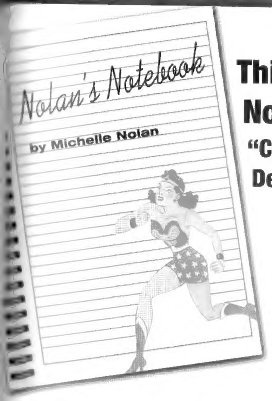
RC

The Bettybug bites

Dan Johnson asks in his *CBM* #101 article, "Archie Adaptations Through the Decades," if anyone besides him remembers the 1978 live action Archie special on ABC-TV. I do, but I recall one detail differently than Dan does. If memory serves me correctly, it was another future *Dallas* cast member, Audrey Landers, and not Charlene Tilton who played the part of Betty. As I recall, she was well cast for the role.

John Fishel
Dallastown, PA

[continued on page 17]



This Casey Should Not Have Struck Out

"Crime Photographer" Deserved a Longer Run from Marvel

For a short while in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Marvel Comics published a batch of densely plotted, heavily worded comics similar to editor Charles Biro's pioneering graphic story efforts from Lev Gleason. These were radically different from both Timely's relatively primitive, if amazingly energetic, Golden Age superhero efforts and its ensuing raft of thousands of four- and five-page stories in dozens of titles under the Atlas imprint from 1951-57.

One of the best of these unusual Marvel titles was *Casey Crime Photographer*, which appeared in a four-issue bi-monthly run from August 1949, through February 1950. These comics are seldom seen today, but Jack "Flashgun" Casey was a fairly well-known character in the 1940s, thanks to a series of stories by famed mystery writer George Harmon Coxe and a successful radio show.

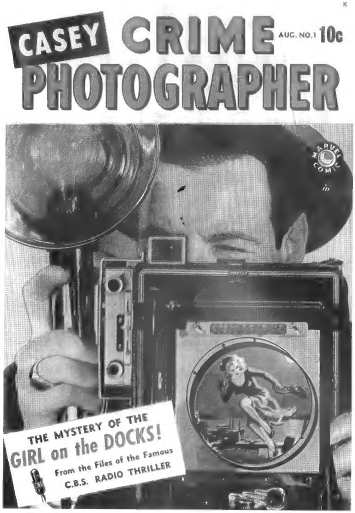
All four issues prominently plugged the "CBS radio thriller" on the covers, all of which were purportedly photos of Staats Cotsworth, who played Flashgun Casey on the radio beginning in 1946. Casey never hit the television screen, unlike the best-known non-costumed hero radio newspaper hero: fighting editor Steve Wilson of the Illustrated Press, who went on to both television and a 50-issue career from 1951-58 in DC's *Big Town Comics*.

Cotsworth also was one of three actors who played Front-Page Farrell, which debuted over the Mutual Network in 1941. Unlike Casey, though, as far as I know Farrell was an original radio newspaper character.

Having worked as a newspaper reporter for the past 37 years—starting as an 18-year-old high school senior—I've always been especially fond of the "knights of the keyboard" as they were portrayed in films, radio, pulps, books—and, of course, the comics. Reporters were almost always used fictionally to solve mysteries, pursue other adventures and/or cover sports, no matter what the medium. Flashgun Casey was no different, just several cuts above the typical newspaper guy or gal in the genre.

Newspapers enjoyed something of a Golden Age of the 1920s through the 1940s, when readership reached a peak before the advent of television began to cut heavily into newspaper readership in the 1950s. Over the past 50 years, the vast majority of cities have become one-newspaper towns and serious readership has dropped to perhaps half the percentage of the United States' population who once read newspapers.

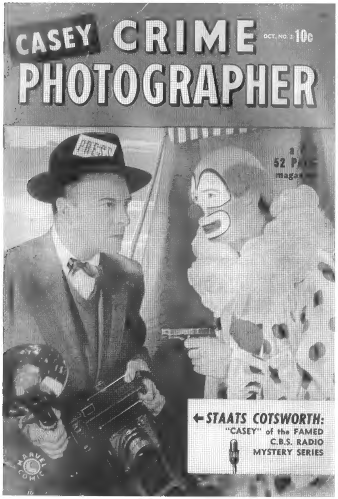
Newspaper reporters are still used in fiction, of course, but nowhere near as often as they once were, even in today's paperback mysteries. And I'll bet for every high school and college student who wants to become a newspaper reporter, ten or more have their eyes on television, news magazines, or even public relations, all of which generally pay far better. Except for veteran reporters on big-city union papers, most reporters are paid salaries that rank at the very bottom for those required to obtain



#1 (Aug 1949) – Cool cover!

a college degree before applying for work.

But in Flashgun Casey's day, print reporters and columnists, not to mention more than a few "shutterbugs," often were almost mythical cultural figures, to be emulated and admired for their daring



#2 (Oct 1949)

if not always their ethics. George Harmon Coxe, though, specialized in realistic mysteries about two newspaper photographers, Kent Murdock and Flashgun Casey. Violence was held to a minimum; instead, Coxe stressed characterization, intelligent detection and a realistic portrayal of how newspapers worked.

Murdock, one of the best-realized images in the history of fiction about newspaper figures, appeared in at least 21 novels from 1936 (*The Barotique Mystery*, later entitled *Murdock's Acid Test*) to at least 1971 (*Fenner*). For reasons I may never understand, this excellent newspaper character apparently never appeared on radio, television, movies or in the comics, except for one extremely rare digest-sized issue from Dell in 1950. That was a 128-page adaptation of *Four Frightened Women*.

Thankfully, though, Flashgun Casey gained much wider media exposure, even though Coxe wrote far fewer novels about the ace photographer, who started out on the *Boston Globe* and then spent the bulk of his career with the *Morning Express*. Coxe penned 23 Casey stories for the legendary pulp *Black Mask* from 1934 through 1943. Only two of these stories were novels, which were reprinted as Dell paperbacks entitled *Murder for Two* (serialized as *Killers Are Camera Shy* in Sep, Oct and Nov 1941).

Of the 21 original *Black Mask* short stories involving Casey, Avon reprinted four in the Avon Murder Mystery Monthly *Flash Casey—Detective* #39 (1946) and reprinted the same four stories in the Avon paperback #143 *Flash Casey—Hard-Boiled Detective* (1948), perhaps to take advantage of the popularity of the radio series. Notice how Casey was promoted to "hard-boiled," which by that time was a somewhat disingenuous reference.

Interestingly, I have never been able to locate any Flash Casey stories outside the pages of *Black Mask* except for three much later hardbound novels from Coxe—*Error in Judgment* (1961), *The Man Who Died Too Soon* (1962) and *Deadly Image* (1964). These three novels star an older, more reflective Casey, who sometimes ruminates on the money he made when an old radio show licensed his name and exploits!

You've heard of life following art and art following life, but this was art following art. Or something like that! By the way, if anyone knows of any Casey stories other than those in *Black Mask*, or if anyone is aware of any other Casey novels, I would love to hear about them! I think I have pinned down everything Coxe did on both Murdock and Casey, but I certainly can't be sure. Does anyone out there have a complete Coxe bibliography, of both novels and short stories?

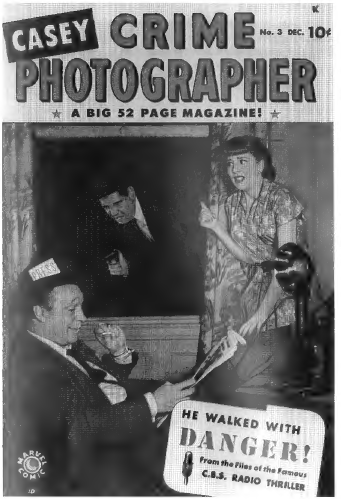
Coxe wrote relatively realistic newspaper stories, although both Murdock and Casey are certainly far more heroic—and much more potent with their fists—than the average real-life newspaper reporter or photographer! They are, in fact, somewhat subdued versions of gallant journalistic supermen.

What's especially intriguing about Casey is that he appeared in comic books more than six years after his last pulp appearance in *Black Mask* in 1943. Unless there are Casey stories I'm not aware of, he was not appearing in original text stories during the run of either his radio show or his comic book.

By the way, Casey's comic book may not have been cancelled due to poor sales. On the contrary, he was a victim of the first Marvel implosion, in 1950—a period of financial distress not nearly as well known as the infamous 1957 implosion.

Many collectors are unaware that Marvel was by far the largest publisher of comic books in 1949—the company produced 271 comics that year, compared to 229 by No. 2 DC (National) and 222 by No. 3 Dell (Western). (Thanks to the indefatigable indexer Dan Stevenson, who has charted every known comic book ever published, for the numbers.)

Marvel had begun to move up the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#3 (Dec 1949)

frequency charts in 1948, with 212 issues compared to 224 from DC, the only company with more in 1948. Yet in 1950, Marvel's multitude of titles were either discontinued or published no more than four to six times a year, and the company finished No. 4 with 187 issues—behind Fawcett's 280, DC's 249 and Dell's 198.

Flashgun Casey was one of the Marvel victims in 1950, and that was a shame. His comic book featured consistently well-plotted stories with decent house-style art. The photo covers weren't nearly as good, however, except for the cover to No. 1, which featured a neat painted image of a woman fleeing from danger on a dock as captured in the lens of Casey's camera.

The cover of #2 was ineffective, portraying the bizarre image of a clown holding a gun on Casey but with no story title blurb to

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explain. The cover to #3 was downright silly, with a worried looking woman having spotted a man in the window with a gun aimed at Casey, who is presumably smiling at his own work in the *Morning Express*. The cover to #4 was only marginally better, with a fierce looking boxer raising a dumbbell in a threatening gesture to Casey as a frightened woman looks on. She may be intended to be his radio assistant, reporter Ann Williams.

Casey is wearing a large "press" sign on the bill of his hat on the covers of #2, 3 and 4, just to get the message across. These covers resemble the photo covers of so many Marvel romance comics of the era, in which facial expressions, particularly those of women, definitely take a holiday from reality. It's as though the company could find nothing but awful actresses to pose for the covers.

In contrast, the stories are uniformly good, perhaps because many of them seem to have been adapted from radio scripts. I don't know if that's true.

The first issue features a list of Casey's radio appearances as of February 15, 1949, which is interesting because the issue probably hit the stands no earlier than May. He is listed on well over 100 stations nationwide in almost every state.

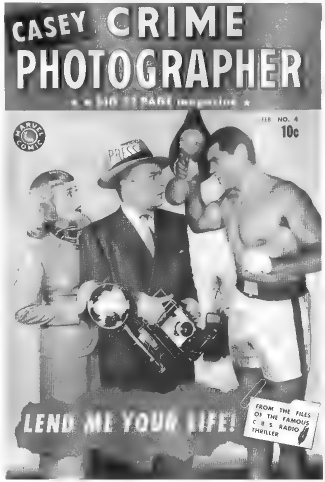
The last story in #1, "Death and the Daredevils!," is a 14-pager about a stolen-car racket run by auto racers. The first two stories are 9-pagers, "The Monkey-Murder Mystery!" And "The Girl on the Docks!" The former is a circus tale and the latter is a classic noir mystery. As the couple aided by Casey and Ann clinch at the finish, Casey wants to go back to work but Ann advises him "But Casey! That's nice work too—if you can get it."

Alas, neither Ann nor any other woman was ever able to pin down the elusive Casey, whom Coxe usually presented as a gentleman of the best sort.

The tales in #2 are entitled "Face-to-Face with the Strangler!" (8 pages), "The Sinister Carnival!" (12 pages) and "Trapped by the Penny Plunderers!" (9 pages). These are all rousing, blood-and-thunder noir crime stories, some of the best to appear in any comic book in 1949.

Also in *Casey* #2 is a full-page house ad for the first issue of *Blaze the Wonder Collie* (#2). It's billed as "America's Most Respected Comic Magazine," but there was only one more issue. Dell's long-running Lassie series would not debut for several more months. But there's no question that Blaze, the story of a boy and his collie, is a Lassie knockoff, since Eric Knight's classic book already had been made into the highly successful films *Lassie Come Home* (1943) and *Son of Lassie* (1945).

It's fascinating to observe the way Marvel plugged *Blaze the Wonder Collie* in a crime comic! On the opposite page of the house ad, Marvel issues a notice saying, "In view of our effort to publish only the very best in entertainment, fit for young and old, we ask that the magazines bearing the Marvel seal be shown to parents and teachers who have been critical of comics. We feel that an examination of these magazines will provide ample proof that Marvel comics are good reading."



#4 (Feb 1950)–Last issue.

In *Casey* #3, our heroes confront "The Mystery of the Glowing Ghost!" in a 12-page epic in which Casey and Ann debunk the supernatural in a small town. Then we have "Damsel in Distress!"—an 8-pager with a rodeo setting—and "The Machine that Predicted Murder!," a 12-pager that exposes a fake time machine.

The crime epics in #4 are entitled "Lend Me Your Life!" (10 pages), "Ma Jenkins Gang Boss" (9 pages) and "The Mystery of Dead Man's Hands!" (12 pages). This is the most overtly crime-themed issue of the four.

All four issues were 52-page comics, which were becoming increasingly rare from Marvel (and several other publishers) as 1950 dawned. Altogether, Marvel produced 126 pages of Flashgun Casey's adventures in only 12 stories. If they were all reprinted in one graphic novel, it would make a wonderful period piece.

Newspaper work is still a highly rewarding profession, for those who can afford to stay in it, but computers and political correctness have changed the face of the profession. Flashgun Casey wouldn't recognize the profession now, since no one smokes in the office, loud arguments are considered poor form, human proofreaders don't exist (although editors are more grossly overworked than ever), and silent offices resemble libraries.

As for flash bulbs, they are now collectors' items.

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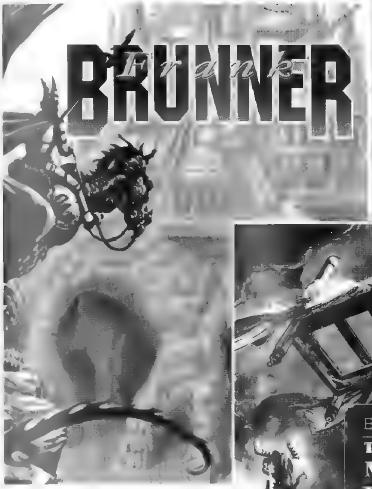

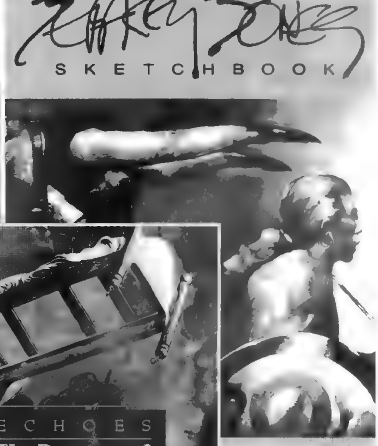

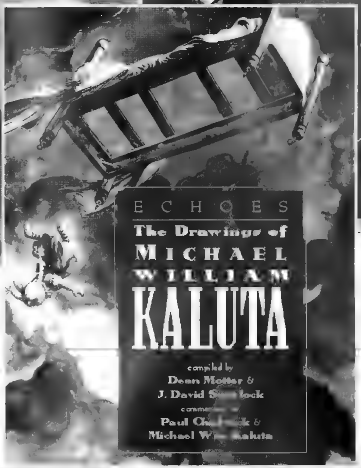

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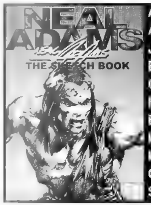

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by Steve Ringgenberg

The Fire This Time

(Or, How to Make a Great-Looking Documentary on America's Greatest Painter With a Teeny Budget and Still Have Fun)

Although Frank Frazetta has been plagued with ill health for the last decade or so and is not producing a lot in the way of new work, these can still be seen as heady times for the maestro's legion of fans because of the torrent of new Frazetta projects and merchandise pouring forth. One of the best Frazetta projects is a new documentary chronicling his life and career entitled, Frazetta: Painting With Fire. *Produced by a small independent production company called Cinemachine, the film is a triumph. Not only is it a vivid portrait of America's most dynamic painter, it's one of the best documentaries on any artist, worthy to stand beside a modern classic like Terry Zwigoff's award-winning* Crumb.

Divided into different sections with titles like "Power and Drama" and "An Artist Emerges," the film traces Frazetta's life from his earliest days right up to the present, exploring virtually every aspect of his art career and punctuated with commentary from friends, colleagues and famous fans like Al Williamson, Angelo Torres, Nick Meglin, Bill Stout, Dave Stevens, Michael Kaluta, Neal Adams, Bo Derek, John Milius, Ralph Bakshi and Bernie Wrightson. Frazetta's children, Holly, Heidi, Frank, Jr. and Bill (with the notable exception of his wife, Ellie), were also interviewed, providing a unique view of this protean artist, whom they know simply as "Dad."

While Frazetta's career built to a steady stream of triumphs from the mid-'60s onward, and his artwork is always dynamic, there is a slightly melancholy tone to this film because of the section where Frazetta and his friends and family discuss his long periods of ill health due to a misdiagnosed thyroid problem followed by a series of strokes. Frazetta survived his harrowing brush with death, but it's a little startling to hear a man as tough and self-reliant as Frazetta has always been talk about contemplating suicide because of his seemingly unending health problems over the last decade. Still, the film ends on a happier note, showing an older, slightly battered looking Frazetta recovered and playing (and drawing) with his grandkids.

Despite being shot on the proverbial shoestring, the film is well mounted, with Michael Goodis' rousing, classically tinged score striking just the right notes to evoke the grandeur of Frazetta's paintings. The film's crisp editing and photography imbue it with an aura of professionalism and respect for its subject, while the filmmakers' innovative use of animation software brings several of Frazetta's most famous paintings to life in visually dazzling ways, at one point even allowing the artist to wander into one of his own landscapes. The film's startling opening sequence shows "The Barbarian," Frazetta's first Conan painting, writhing and moving while the flames in the background flicker and dance. Frazetta: Painting With Fire *is an artistic triumph, an apt tribute to one of America's finest painters.*

To understand how Cinemachine was able to put together a world-class documentary on a modest budget, I spoke with director Lance Laspina by phone earlier this year. What follows is an edited version of that conversation.

Ringgenberg: I liked the musical score you used, but I was surprised that it wasn't by Basil Poledouris, who did the score for the Conan films, as you'd originally announced.

Laspina: Well, we had originally approached a friend of mine, Michael Goodis, to do the score when we first started filming—it was August of 1999 when we rolled camera—so it obviously was a while before Michael would be composing. In the meantime we were using Basil's music as a temp score on all the trailers that we cut and it seemed to be working well, so on a whim we decided to try and approach Basil. We sent him a trailer tape and he loved it and he called us back immediately and was very enthralled about working on the project. At that point he was interested in working on projects that he felt were more meaningful, that would have some kind of impact on society, that sort of thing, as opposed to the typical Hollywood film that he was getting offered. So I did meet with him, and we went over the project. I had a lot of work to do in order to get a rough cut to him so that he could start working. So there

was about a nine-month [waiting] period…and in that interim Basil was working on other projects. He was in China working on a film and he said when he got back, he would start the Frazetta film. So when he did get back, that's when it became very hard to get in touch with him. He wasn't returning e-mails or phone calls. Eventually I found out from his wife that he was in Canada scouting out a production and realized at that point, well, he's obviously not going to start working on ours if he's looking for other work, so we decided to go ahead in another direction at that point. So I had to re-approach Michael Goodis and apologize and say, "Okay, Basil is *not* going to do it now. Will you come back and do a score for us?"

Ringgenberg: I understand you had to go to some pains to have the film scored by the Prague Symphony. Can you describe what you and Michael Goodis went through to get your score recorded?

Laspina: We flew Michael out from Pittsburgh to Los Angeles. There's a facility in Santa Monica, California that has a real-time video and audio hookup to Prague, Czechoslovakia. So we were capable of…speaking and hearing what the orchestra was doing. We had to send over the music digitally, of course. They printed it out, gave all the parts to the musicians, and Michael, using a microphone and a headset, communicated with the conductor. And the conductor, I'm glad to say he spoke English with Michael, but then whenever he would take the headphones off, you could hear him speaking Czech to the musicians…. And they'd go off and do a run, and then he'd put the headphones back on. He also had a TV set, a monitor, as well, so that he could see whenever Michael was ready to speak with him. Michael would give him feedback on the last take and they would adjust it and go, and we just went like that for an hour and 45 minutes. We only did two pieces of music out of the film—the opening and the photomontage, which is toward the very end of the film. The rest was done by Michael, or by Michael and another composer named Phillip Gilberti, who played piano in the film. Michael also brought in two guitarists for the museum opening sequence. And so there are several musicians that actually worked in the film, but mostly the whole thing is pretty much done by Michael. It's pretty amazing.

Ringgenberg: I thought that the orchestral score really contributed to the grandeur of the visuals. Did you know that Frank Frazetta is a big classical music fan?

Laspina: Yes, and that's why we had "Moonlight Sonata" playing at the end because that was kind of like an ode to Frazetta—you know he used to work late at night listening to classical music a lot. I don't know if "Moonlight" is one of the pieces that he loved listening to, but it seemed to fit the mood. I know he mentioned "The Four Seasons" as being one of his favorites, but we wanted something a little more moody and somber. We wanted it to be very classy in its nature in general in order to do justice to Frazetta's work and represent it in the best way possible in terms of a visual medium. Obviously Frank's paintings are static pieces but they seem to come alive when you're standing in front of them looking at them. And we wanted to do that with the visual medium of film and bring them even more to life and add animation and so forth and we wanted to dramatize them with the music and hit all of your senses at once, which is kind of what Frank's work does already.

Ringgenberg: The use of animation, bringing Frank's paintings to life, was very interesting. How did you achieve that?

Laspina: Well, there are two different styles that we used. First I want to start by saying that the decision to do something like that is not something that you take lightly, especially because you realize that you're opening yourself up to criticism. And we realized right off the bat, if we're going to do this it has to look good. And we're not going to go overboard and make it tedious or go too far with it and risk the element of still looking like a Frazetta painting. We wanted to maintain that and just add a little bit of life, just a

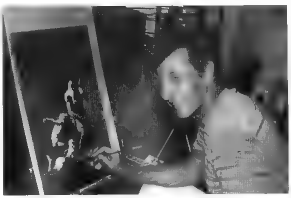
little bit of movement to it. So, in the opening sequence that starts the film, we brought Frank's barbarian character to life. We actually took a sculpture by Clayburn Moore to a service bureau named Gentle Giant Studios in Los Angeles. The owner was a Frazetta fan so fortunately he was able to scan it in for free for us, which was fantastic because otherwise it would have cost a lot of money to do. So he scanned the statue into the computer, which turned it into a 3-D model. From that point, we used textures from Frank's paintings. During one of my trips back to the Frazettas' I took extensive photography, close-ups of the Frazetta "Barbarian" painting and used those, and gave them to the 3-D artist, which he literally projected onto the 3-D model, and so that way you still have Frank's paint strokes. It's not supposed to look like a real human, it's supposed to look like Frazetta's painting come to life, and so we did that and then added some movement. We had a lot of atmospheric elements. We had the fire behind him, movement with him thrusting the sword down in the earth and, obviously, with the sound effects, the sound design, the music…it really makes it look like you're in this world of Frazetta and it's something that hasn't been done before, so we're really excited to get this reaction from fans. And everyone who's seen it is just blown away, which is what we were looking for.

There was another, more simplistic way that we also brought some of Frank's paintings to life. When we started off 'Power and Drama," there's an animation with the painting "Against the Gods" where the character seems to flex his arms and thrust the sword into position right before the lightning strikes, and that was done in a two-dimensional fashion using a program called Elastic Reality. And basically, I just took his arms and warped them into position, and then I extended them back out to the original position and used this illusion that they're actually moving. So, we did little things like that in animating the lightning strike coming down and little sparks coming off of the strike. We just tried to look at every little element and say, "Okay, what can we add to this to make it really come to life?"

Ringgenberg: How many interviews did you eventually wind up doing for the film?

Laspina: Oh, gosh, I would guess thirty. I can look at the movie poster and find out almost exactly how many we did. But I'm pretty sure there were close to thirty interviews.

Ringgenberg: Considering you interviewed a couple of moviemakers, did you get any kind of filmmaking advice



from either John Milius or Ralph Bakshi?

Laspina: No. You know, it's funny. I don't know if maybe they felt like they were going to be stepping on my toes or something like that but they didn't really offer anything. And also maybe just because it's a documentary and I don't think either of them had done a documentary, maybe they felt like that wasn't their realm or something. They didn't really offer any advice. (Laughs) I would have taken it—at least listened to it anyway.

Ringgenberg: I was a little surprised to see Frank sitting with Ralph because I had thought that their relationship had kind of soured after making *Fire and Ice* together.

Laspina: I think, like anything, time kind of heals wounds and it seems like they kind of picked up where they left off prior to whatever happened at the end there that maybe caused them some disagreements. But they got along real well during the interview and even off-camera as well. They were showing each other's artwork as well. Ralph had brought down several of the paintings that he had done recently and was showing them to Frank, so, yeah, it seemed like they got along well.

Ringgenberg: What medium was the movie shot in?

Laspina: It was shot in digital video. It was shot on a Canon XL-1 as the primary camera. We had a few other cameras as well, but that was the one for probably 95% of the footage you'll see. A lot of people who see the film don't realize that it was shot on digital video. They think it was shot on film, which is a great compliment.

Ringgenberg: Did you use any kind of software to add texture, to make it look like film?

Laspina: That's one thing a lot of people do. They try to add grain to make it look like film, and I'm kind of against that. I think that you should make your video look the best it can be, and if ends up looking like film, so be it. But I didn't have intentions of trying to make it look like film by adding grain. The way you make it look better, you work with the colors and you work with the contrast. And…primarily, just by adding a lot of contrast and getting the blacks black, it's going to help it look more like film anyway; and then, as far as the colors, just

[continued on page 71]

Playing with Fire

Kevin Rasel on *Frazetta: Painting with Fire*, and the new Death Dealer book

Interview conducted by Bill Baker

When he's not singing, playing guitar or writing songs for his melodic heavy metal band Stronghold, which has warmed up crowds for such well-established and popular bands as Queensryche and White Snake, you'll likely find Kevin "Raz" Rasel working diligently on his latest piece of lush and highly detailed art in his studio. Unless, that is, he's off doing sketches at a con, or working as co-producer of Frazetta: Painting with Fire, *the first documentary film to fully examine the life and work of that legendary artist. Quite simply, Rasel is a gentleman with a lot of energy, great imagination and a real determination to do his best work on whatever he sets his hand to. All these fine qualities have served him well, with the result that his work has begun to garner the attention and approval of both fans and his fellow pros—including the aforementioned Mr. Frank Frazetta.*

Rasel set aside a few moments from his rather overstuffed schedule to explain just how Frazetta's influence helped set him on his current path, what it was like to work on the documentary with Frank and his wife, Ellie, and how all this led—inevitably, it seems—to his becoming the newest artist to work on one of that master illustrator's seminal creations, the Death Dealer.

Comic Book Marketplace: With everything that you're currently involved with, from co-producing the *Frazetta: Painting with Fire* film to being tapped to create the new Death Dealer comic, would it be a safe assumption that you've been somewhat influenced by Frazetta's work?

Kevin Rasel: Absolutely. Frazetta is pretty much the reason that I turned to fantasy art to begin with. I discovered him back in high school, and I'd always kind of had the artistic talent, but it was Frazetta's work that just jumped out and screamed, "Look at me! Look what you can do with your talent, with artwork. Look how imaginative you can be, and wild." All those fantasy images made an extremely lasting—and *emotional*—impact on this sixteen-year-old or so high school art student. So my artwork was never the same since then. I made a very firm decision, *immediately* upon discovering Frazetta's work, to turn my attention towards that genre of work, and to try to be the best that I could be at doing that type and style of work.

CBM: How did you get involved with the making of the documentary?

Rasel: It's interesting that I just mentioned high school, because my friends in high school, my fellow Frazetta fans and art students, were George Davis and Lance Laspina. We met in art class, over a Frazetta book, and it was us, ultimately, that kept in touch over the years and decided just a few years ago to produce this Frazetta film. We were getting frustrated over the years that we were not seeing a very good…well, we weren't seeing *any* type of documentary about this fantastic American illustrator. There's certainly a bevy of books and materials available on Frazetta, but never a really good documentary about the life, and the man. And I think a lot of people will agree that Frazetta the man has always been a bit of a mystery. There's a mystique, even to the most ardent of Frazetta fans, because he's so reclusive and shy towards the public. He's not a big media hound, so they don't get a very good glimpse into what his life is like, what his personality is like. So we were frustrated by that, and were eager young film makers as well. It was the kind of thing where you thought, "Somebody *must* be doing it!" And you always just assume that someone else out there is going to do this great project that you've conceived of. But we said, "No, you know what? Maybe no one is doing this." So we decided to take it on ourselves, and took steps from there [to make it a reality].

CBM: How hard was it to get Frank to agree to participate with the project? Was he at all reticent about allowing you the kind of up-close access the film would require?

Rasel: Actually, after we started some initial ground work with the documentary itself, the very first step we made was to approach Ellie Frazetta. As a lot of people may or may not know, Ellie tends to run the Frazetta empire, if you will. She's the business person, and that makes her the contact person for anything Frazetta. So she was our first contact, and at first, I wouldn't say there was a reluctance but just a sense of [her testing if] we were really going to be doing a respectable project. So we had to kind of prove ourselves with a lot of initial ground work, and a lot of interviews that we did, and basically putting together a preliminary trailer for

the would-be documentary. And it was that trailer that, ultimately, won the Frazettas over, and helped us to make first contact.

And from that point on, we found it *very* easy to get to know them, and to get their cooperation. We then found them to be 100% behind us and, most importantly, very trusting of what we were handling. And I think it was our genuine *passion* for the project, and the fact that it wasn't really about money, or any kind of exploitation of his work. We were genuinely interested in knowing about this person, and preserving the Frazetta legacy. And I think the Frazettas responded to that and, basically, took us in to the fold.

Our first encounter with Frank himself was during a two-day visit, which was itself a preliminary visit for the two-week location shoot we did on the Frazetta estate. And those two days were just exceptional. Lance and I went out there and met both Frank and Ellie. And I'm happy to say Frank is just a *very* social guy, very easy going and great to get along with; a *funny* guy, and not at all reclusive or shy. It's just that he's not big on public appearances, or interviews and stuff like that. But once you get close to the man, he's just a *blast* to hang around with.

It was an incredible experience, to finally meet him and to get their full cooperation. We certainly did our best to live up to the standards that they were expecting of us, and I hope we continue to do that.

CBM: Speaking of living up to expectations, why don't we talk about the new Death Dealer book. How did that project come about, and who's publishing it?

Rasel: It's interesting, because it's a very informal thing.

As I said, we spent two weeks on the Frazetta estate when we were filming the documentary, so naturally, when you spend two weeks with a whole family—in this case Frazetta's family—you tend to get to know each other pretty well. We were enjoying a very social situation there, as well as the work we were doing on the project itself. So at one point, during some down time and some fun free time, I took the opportunity to show Frank and Ellie some of my portfolio of work—which, of course, is extremely Frazetta influenced. And I found, to my *incredible* delight, that they were very interested in my work, very supportive and very pleased to find that I had a strong Frazetta influence but, at the same time, I wasn't ripping Frazetta off, or taking too *close* an inspiration, stealing his ideas and stuff. I had my own sort of thing, but was moving in the kind of style and direction that Frazetta's work inspires.

So as we were going over this stuff, and I could see and sense that they were liking my work. We also had talked about, with some *frustration*, the Death Dealer situation up to that point. Which, as a lot of fans may know, there was a Death Dealer book from Verotik, Glen Danzig's publishing company. And I don't want to say anything negative at this point about that, just that there was a lot of, shall we say, *overt* sex and violence involved in those particular Frazetta-inspired books. I guess the Frazettas themselves were not terribly pleased with the material that was going into those books—nor how, unfortunately, they didn't really find out about what was going on inside of them until it was already published and Frazetta's work was on the cover.

So we discussed all that, and then it kind of came up and I seized the opportunity, if you will, considering this would be a dream project for me. I said, "Hey, if we could come up with a fresh, new approach, would you guys be interested in having me work on a Death Dealer book, a kind of new take on the character?" At which time they gave a few, "Hmmms," and didn't think too long or deliberate about it, and said, "Hey, sure! Why not?" And it was pretty much that informal. [General laughter]

Frank—I guess you'll find [out] if you ever have the good fortune to meet him—is just a very laid-back guy. Very unassuming and very matter-of-fact, and doesn't make a big deal about things. So it was kind of a nice, informal moment. I guess—for them. For *me*, of course, it was an amazing personal breakthrough. It was like, "Wow. I just had one of my greatest creative heroes just say, 'Hey, sure, why don't you work on one of my characters?'" So that's about the size of how it came about.

Then, at that point, Ellie and I had a brief conversation about some of the practical business and promotional aspects of it, some of the formatting issues. And from that point she let me loose to look for a publisher.

Well, I didn't have a whole lot of contacts in the business. And, basically, I began to experience some real frustration over the course of the next six months to a year, trying to get a publisher interested. I had talked to some publishers at some conventions directly, and got some various degrees of interest and commentary on the whole idea. Ultimately, at the end of things, I got frustrated and even kind of turned off by the whole experience because I was getting a lot of opinions and suggestions before I'd even put pencil to paper for the book.

I was determined to be the art director on this, as well as the artist of the book, in order to determine my own course and the standards of this book—and try to keep that standard entirely within the Frazetta's sense of taste, and with their approval. I was very determined that I would see to it, personally, that I had *everything* that I would do approved directly and personally by the Frazettas themselves.

So, after a certain point, I decided to call Ellie and just explain to her personally what was going on. And it was a great conversation, because she said, at the same time, that Frank and her had been discussing the Death Dealer, the fact that they hadn't heard from me in a while, and they were wondering what was up. And then she said, "Hey, forget all that frustration! You know what? We're going to publish it. Let's just publish it ourselves. We'll do it as an art book. Forget about the comic series. Let's do it in black and white. Let's do a graphic novel story, but let's also have a gallery of art work, and we'll go with a Frazetta cover. We won't get too many editors or other artists involved, and we'll just keep it straightforward and simple, and just take that approach."

So that was just a month or two ago, and I've been having a go at it since. And that brings us pretty much up to speed with it at this point.

CBM: Do you have any idea of when that might be coming out?

Rasel: I wouldn't dare venture into that at this point. I'm really going to do this right, so we have no deadline. It's all about doing a really high quality book, and approach, and at this point we haven't set any particular target date, or deadline.

CBM: What do you get from creating art?

Rasel: I do this work because I love to do it, and I love to do it well. And it's because of my stubbornness about trying to do my very best work, and to take the proper time to do it right, [that's] why, I guess, I'm not a stronger name in the business, and not working on more projects. Perhaps if I was willing to maybe cut corners here and there, maybe do some lesser work, and pick up the pace, I would certainly do better financially in this business. I would probably have more work out, and—perhaps—even a more prominent name recognition. But it's very much an influence from Frazetta, in fact, that I stubbornly try to do what's best for the work.

CBM: What do you hope people get from your art?

Rasel: What I hope they get from my art, definitely, is inspiration. I hope people get inspired.

For fans—and other artists, alike—I hope that they are entertained. But, hopefully, even more than that, that they're moved in a way to be inspired to draw and create, or even just to be imaginative. Or just to have them say, "Wow! Isn't that cool?" sometimes is enough satisfaction for me.

CBM: What about *Frazetta: Painting with Fire*? What do you hope they get from the documentary?

Rasel: As far as the film goes, once again, I think inspiration. That, and probably just a sense of knowing this great American illustrator.

A lot of people consider Frank, obviously, a fantasy illustrator, and kind of pigeon-hole him into that whole genre. But I think it's important to note that Frazetta is a Great American Illustrator, very much—I believe, and I think a lot of other people feel the same way—the same as a Wyeth, or a Norman Rockwell, or any of those prominent names in the history of American illustration. And I think he needs to be recognized in that sense, and his legacy needs to be preserved in that sense. So that new generations can discover and learn more about this great force in art, and his life, through this film. And that was, in no small sense, our goal while making this documentary—to preserve Frazetta's great legacy, and to show that he is, indeed, a fantastic, and historically important, artist in any genre.

Those interested in buying a copy of the Frazetta: Painting with Fire *documentary should go to www.cinemachine.net; anyone interested in learning more about Kevin Rasel's musical endeavors should go to www.strongholdmetal.com.*

Marketplace Mail

[continued from page 6]

The phantom *Menage-rie*

I was in my local comic shop when I came across your #95 (Oct 2002) issue with the great Donald Duck cover. As I flipped through I found a great comic panel from Disney called *Merry Menagerie*. What a great panel! I had to have the copy for that alone. Can you please tell me any more about *Merry Menagerie* and where I can see more panels? Was there ever a book or comic book of *Merry Menagerie*? Thank you so much for all you do at *CBM*!

Pat Powell
Collins, GA

As author Alberto Becattini pointed out in his article, the Merry Menagerie *daily panel ran from 1947 through 1962 in newspapers across the country, but to my knowledge these panels were never reprinted in book form or in a comic book. Readers! If any of you knows of such a book or comic, set me straight!*

RC

They *were* Artists

I enjoyed reading Michelle Nolan's article on Juvenile Delinquency in *CBM* #102. As a long-time film buff, I must point out one small error. The 1937 epic, *Dead End* which introduced the Dead End Kids, was not a Warner Brothers production, but rather a Samuel Goldwyn production, released through United Artists. Following *Dead End*, the Dead End Kids troupe did sign with Warner Brothers for their subsequent films.

Jay Raskin
Warren, NJ

Michelle is not to blame, it's ME! Yes, I must take the blame for this. When I was proofreading Michelle's article, I changed the text to read Warner Brothers, thinking that I was correct. I now stand corrected, and—sorry, Michelle—I shouldn't have doubted your scholarship. From now on I will know better than to mess with her text!

RC

The Incredible Bruce Jones

Interview by Dan Johnson

Bruce Jones is one of the perfect people to talk to on the subject of fantasy artists. As a writer, Bruce has had the good fortune to work with some true legends in the field of comic book art. If that weren't enough to make him qualified, there is also the fact that Bruce Jones is one heck of an illustrator himself. During Bruce's career he did stories for Warren's Eerie *and* Creepy *magazines, breathed new life into the Marvel character Ka-Zar and caught Hollywood's eye with his series* Somerset Holmes. *The books that first brought Bruce Jones to my attention, though, were the anthology comics he did at Pacific Comics in the early 1980s,* Alien Worlds *and* Twisted Tales. *Every issue of these magazines was a wonder that featured art from the likes of Bernie Wrightson, Richard Corben, Bo and Scott Hampton, Mike Ploog, Tim Conrad, John Bolton and Al Williamson, just to name a few. As a youngster, the art attracted me to these books, but it was the splendid storytelling of Bruce Jones that kept me coming back for more each and every time.*

These days Bruce Jones is thrilling a whole new generation (and blowing the socks off us older readers) with his current run on The Incredible Hulk. *At the time I contacted Bruce about doing this interview, he was right in the middle of the publicity whirlwind that accompanied the theatrical release of Universal's Hulk. Still he was kind enough to take some time from his hectic schedule to answer some questions about his career via e-mail.*

CBM: First off, tell us a little bit about yourself, Bruce. Where were you born and what was your family background?

Bruce Jones: I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, but grew up in St. Louis and Webster Groves, a St. Louis suburb. I've been a suburban kid all my life, typical *Leave It to Beaver* right down to the older brother, working dad and homemaker mom with pearl necklace. I have vague memories of early urban life, but the burbs were and still are (except for eight years in New York) my breeding ground. Big yards, green lawns, burning leaves in the fall, Cardinal baseball in the summer and *The Adventures of Superman* on TV—that was me.

CBM: What were some of the comics that first sparked your interest in the comic book field?

Jones: Well, when I was a kid there were a lot more comics and a lot more comic companies so my tastes were accordingly eclectic. Comics were winding down from the Last Great Age but they were everywhere and generally considered a kid's medium. I read them because I read everything including the milk carton from a fairly early age, always drawn to the written word, equally drawn to illustration in magazines, movie posters, old Scribner books, anything I could get my hands on. When I wasn't doing that I was playing football or baseball or riding my bike all over hell. I was the weird kid at school who was [a] good athlete, got the girl, and ran with the theater and journalism crowd. No one knew what to make of me. I had a short attention span but terrific focus, which I guess makes me ADD, or ADHD, or whatever the hell that thing is they put kids today on Ritalin for. We didn't have Ritalin then so my report cards looked like roller coaster tracks. But voracious reading habits made me look good in English and helped the teachers think I was smarter than I was.

CBM: Who are some of the artists and writers that have been your favorites?

Jones: I was a huge Carl Barks fan as a child, though I didn't know who he was, but I could always tell him from the other duck artists even if none of my friends could, or cared to. I followed Dick Tracy and Prince Valiant regularly in the Sunday pages. Later in high school I discovered some old EC comics in a used bookstore and dived right into Williamson and Frazetta, Wally Wood, that whole school. That's the way I wanted to draw and that was my style when I first approached the New York offices with my portfolio. I was determined to be an illustrator or novelist. I never considered doing comic work in the beginning.

CBM: What writers or artists outside the comics field do you admire? How would you say these men and/or women have influenced your story telling?

Jones: Outside the comics field my biggest influence was movies and TV, like most kids I guess. Walt Disney was probably my biggest inspiration, I'm still awestruck by anything his studio turned out before about 1955, with the exception of those later Tomorrowland space program shows on TV, those were very

influential. In film, Elia Kazan was a major influence, Howard Hawks, Arthur Penn, Jack Arnold, and especially Jacques Tourneur and the films Val Lewton produced. I was a film noir freak, which is strange considering I dream in color. I think all comic writers learn to think visually through the movies whether they admit it or not. I mean, who hasn't been affected by Hitchcock's deceptively linear style? Or Spielberg's *Jaws*?

As far as writers, Richard Matheson was my biggest mentor in the early days, then Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont, Shirley Jackson, Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, Jack Finney, Robert Sheckley. I moved away from sci-fi and fantasy after college and read everything by John Buell, John Updike, Mitchell Smith and Hank Searls. Those people taught me about structure, characterization and, along with Hemingway of course, being succinct.

CBM: As I understand it, you got into the comics field doing writing and art for Marvel and DC in the early 1970s. What were some of the titles you worked on?

Jones: I'm not sure I recall with complete clarity. I know I did some early work for Joe Kubert over at DC on his war books, drawing, I think, and I worked for Roy Thomas at Marvel as an artist for his science fiction books and a writer for *Conan* and *Red Sonja*. The thing about comics that differs from novels and movie and TV work is the sheer volume of it you end up doing. I did some solo illustrations for *Amazing*, *Fantastic* and *Galaxy* magazines. Then some art and a lot of writing for the Warren books like *Creepy* and *Eerie*, etc. I was just churning out the short story material in those days like I really had some idea what I was doing. There were some other companies in there as well, Harvey's mystery line, I think, and some of the other black and white magazines, which were a hot thing at the time. I really never made a list of my output, I was just trying to pay the rent and feed the family. Somehow I got typed as a horror writer, not sure I still understand exactly why.

CBM: You took over *Red Sonja* from Roy Thomas, right? Was that type of book something you enjoyed doing? I mean, did you prefer something that went against the traditional super-hero books that DC and Marvel were doing at that time?

Jones: *Red Sonja* was fun because I had done mostly short-story oriented drawing and writing up to that point and here was a chance to do an ongoing character and stretch that set of muscles for a while. I've also found that one doesn't always do his best work with things one thinks he has an affinity for.

Sometimes a challenge produces the best results. Some of my best-received stuff has resulted from situations where I really had no idea what the hell I was doing. You have to reach down deep during those moments, get personal you know? And I think maybe that shows in the work. I never did a lot of super-hero work because I was never asked to, or what little I did perhaps nobody liked. But I'd have done more if asked. I love challenges, breaking the mold, reinventing the wheel. It's what keeps artists, and comics, honest. At least that's my opinion. I'm not sure Axel agrees, he probably just thinks I'm a pain in the ass.

CBM: Tell us about your days at *Eerie* and *Creepy*? How did you come to work for the Warren magazines?

Jones: As I mentioned, back in those days I had this Hal Foster, Frazetta, Williamson vibe that made getting work at Marvel and DC pretty tough, totally my own fault; I should have been aping Jack Kirby like everyone else but, though I loved Jack both as artist and friend, I just couldn't do that. The Warren books seemed like a natural home to me, but every time I went up to see them Jim had a new editor and they were indifferent to my stuff for the most part; I think I got a few art jobs along the way. Then Bill Dubay came on and I really got nowhere at all with him. I was running around with Wrightson and Jeff Jones and Kaluta in those days, and I think maybe Bernie asked me to write something for him something like that. Anyway, I wrote a story called "Jennifer" and that one Dubay bought. Shortly after that, Weezie (Louise Simonson) came on board to edit the books. The advantage, of course, was that we already knew each other socially because she was married to Jeff Jones at the time and we were all good friends. But I honestly don't know what she thought about my writing until she called and asked me to send her some stuff. Whatever the case, she certainly got me more involved in comics than I ever had been up to that point.

CBM: It was perhaps your time at Warren that you really first got to work with some of the best fantasy artists that have ever graced the comic page. Who were some of your favorite artists to work with at Warren?

Jones: Well, timing is everything, isn't it? Again, it was that serendipity thing. Whatever the essential worth of my stories, when you have guys like Bernie Wrightson, Russ Heath and Rich Corben illustrating them, it makes one hell of a difference. I know this for a fact, because I wrote a lot of stuff for Weezie and one or two of them were as good as anything I did for those guys but no one ever remembers them. You really are only as good as the artist you work with in this field. I was just very, very lucky. And with Hulk, I've continued to be lucky with guys like Mike Deodato and everyone who came before him. There hasn't been a loser in the bunch, and in fact they've all been extraordinary in their own way. Of course, credit should be given to Axel Alonso for finding them. All I did was

turn in the full script, he picked the artists from John Jr. right on down.

CBM: What would you say are the best stories you wrote from your days at Warren? Which stories are you most proud of?

Jones: The stories I worked on with Russ Heath and Rich Corben come to mind the most. And Bernie, of course. I don't know, I don't have a personal favorite, they're all different for different reasons and all bring back pleasant memories of a time none of us had any idea was going to mean anything to future generations. It's nice that it has.

CBM: Tell us about your work at Pacific Comics. How did the idea for *Alien Worlds* and *Twisted Tales* come about?

Jones: In the early '80s, Warren Publishing ran into financial difficulty and work dried up for a while. Louise Jones moved over to Marvel to become editor there. To my shock she called and asked if I'd be interested in writing their Ka-zar and Conan books. I was also doing a few things for DC at the time. I was living in the Midwest at the time, and couldn't shop my work in New York as I had before so I accepted Weezie's offer.

Around that time Spielberg and Lucas were hot in Hollywood and everybody wanted to direct. I thought I'd see what that was all about. I'd been thinking of moving to L.A. when I met April Campbell. We shared a love for film, were both crazy about *Jaws* and wanted to try TV and movie work. Steve and Bill Schanes had just begun Pacific Comics in San Diego, which was primarily a distribution company at that point. He called to see if I'd like to do some books for them. I had sold some science fiction books to Warner Books back then under the packaging named BJA and wanted to keep the company going, so I told Steve if I could do whatever I wanted I'd be willing to give it a go. I felt that at the very least working for Pacific would be a good excuse to move to California and be close to movies. Steve agreed, so April and I moved out to San Diego.

I looked at the comic market, which was swamped with super-heroes then, and decided to try some anthology titles just to be different. It never would have worked if I hadn't had so many close friends who were superstars in the comic business. I got just about everybody I knew but Russ Heath to work on the books and it was a lot of fun, if exhausting. I wrote almost every story myself and drew a few plus the art directing and hiring and generally packaging the books for PC under the BJA emblem so all they really had to do was take them to the printer. It was a lot of work because I set high standards for myself and wanted to make these great artists look good. I'm not sure if I could work those kinds of long hours today. The phone work alone was a killer, and if any artist missed a deadline we were sunk because we had no back ups. But it all worked out pretty well. Some of those issues contain my all-time favorite stories. It's a pity there doesn't seem to be much market for short stories these days.

CBM: The books had a heck of a lot of talented guys from Al Williamson to Mike Ploog to Richard Corben and Bernie Wrightson. The books also helped established folks like the Hampton Brothers. Were there any artists you wanted for the books that were never able to do any stories? Anyone who got away that you regretted?

Jones: Russ was the one that got away. He and I had done some fun stuff at Warren and I'd have liked to have kept that going for a while. But he had other commitments. And, of course, you could never get Frazetta to do anything. I would liked to have used Bill Stout more on interior work but he was very busy with Hollywood making a lot more money than I could pay. Also Dave Steven, but he was launching *The Rocketeer*.

CBM: Around the same time you did *AW* and *TT*, you also did *Somerset Holmes*. That was the project that got you working in Hollywood, wasn't it? I remember there was talk of there being a movie based on the comic at one time. Any chance that film project might eventually see the light of day?

Jones: Yes, April and I still wanted to try our hand at Hollywood and we figured, slightly ahead of our time it seems, that doing a comic that looked like a movie might attract the L.A. crowd. We designed *Somerset* specifically for that purpose and it got optioned right after the first issue. Ed Pressman over at Warner Brothers bought it and it really looked like a go project for a time. He wanted Jamie Lee Curtis for the part. We approached the same talent agency, APA, that the director was using to help us with the legal end, and they suggested April and I write the screenplay. So that got us into the Writer's Guild and that led to work at HBO and the networks, etc. I was still doing comics regularly at the time. Those were hectic days. But great fun. Believe it or not, I *still* get calls from producers asking to option *Somerset*. It's weird. You can make a living in Hollywood just on option money, never actually getting a movie on the screen at all.

Script by Jones, art by Leo Duranova.

CBM: In an interview I read in researching these questions, I read you almost got out of comics. What prompted that decision? And what stroke of good luck for your fans got you back into the game?

Jones: I didn't "almost" get out of comics. I started writing novels and TV and movies out in California and the comic industry completely forgot me! All it takes is a few years and a couple of new editorial regimes and you sort of blow away with the wind. The same is true of Hollywood. Stop working for a while and believe me, no one will miss you! Most of staying alive as a freelancer is whom you connect with in the editorial arena. I had tried to break into the Warren books for months when Bill Dubay and others were editing the books but they didn't care for what I was offering. Then Louise Jones became editor and bought everything I wrote. Louise, probably more than anyone, helped launch my career. When Axel Alonso began editing the Vertigo line for Karen Berger at DC he remembered reading my *Creepy* stuff when he was a kid and called me up to work on his Vertigo anthology titles. I had never been able to get much past Karen and still can't.... Then Axel went over to Marvel and was given a soft-selling title in *The Hulk*. He called and asked me to take a shot at it. I think it was sort of what happened years before with *Ka-Zar,* the book was doing so poorly they figured hiring anyone new couldn't make it worse. But I think everyone at Marvel—including me—was surprised when *Hulk* took off so fast. I don't think you can manufacture hits like that, they just happen, which is why it's hard to claim too much responsibility for them. It's serendipity and timing and cosmic things beyond our control.

CBM: Your run on the *Hulk* comic has really helped to set the fields of many fans on fire. I dare say it is the best take on the character in years. What can you tell us about what the future holds for the character under Bruce Jones?

Jones: I want to continue to explore the relationship between Banner and Hulk, exactly what it is and means, and I'd like to go back and do our take on what really happened when that first gamma bomb went off. I have several scenarios I'm unreeling as I go, but I'm a big believer in surprises (I mean, that's really half the fun of reading comics isn't it?) so I don't want to give away too much here. I'm sort of from the Brando school of comic writing, i.e., you don't want to over-rehearse or lock yourself down in the writing process, otherwise nothing comes across as spontaneous. For me, *The Hulk* has always been a work in progress.

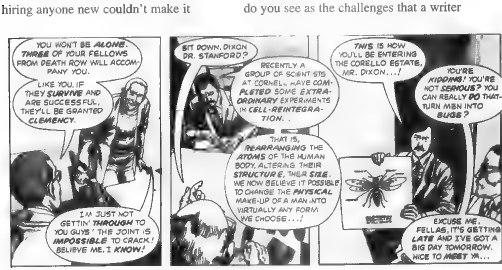
CBM: What do you feel have been the biggest changes in the industry from the time you left comics and the time that Axel got you back into the game? What do you see as the challenges that a writer faces these days that maybe he or she didn't a couple of decades ago?

Jones: Well, the industry as a whole has shrunk tremendously. There are far fewer titles and they sell far less well. Our first issue of *Twisted Tales* sold around a hundred thousand copies, which would be a roaring success by today's standards. Conversely, even though comics don't sell as well as they did in the eighties, the public awareness for them has never been higher and Hollywood has never been more interested. Nor have the conventions ever been so large. It's a very strange time. The competition is truly wicked. I wouldn't want to be a young Turk starting out right now, the level of writing and art has risen sharply and there's much more pressure to do not only good work, but the best you can possibly muster. Basically it's the haves and have-nots, which is a shame. And the number of independent companies has dwindled to practically nothing, making it tougher for new talent to get a foothold. On the other hand, if you have a hot book, you can still make a decent living. And if you come up with a good creator-owned concept, Hollywood will often come sniffing. My advice: hold out for a big up-front check, because you probably won't get to do the screenplay—or at least not the re-re-rewrite.

CBM: Finally, if the chance were to present itself, would you be willing to go back to doing artwork again?

Jones: I'd be willing, but I don't know if readers would still be as receptive to my illustrative style. My work always had a quiet quality, and fans today like a lot of eye candy and visual bang for their buck. But hey, you never know! Stay tuned! ☺

I want to give a special thanks to Marc Ballard at Comic City/Outer Limits of Nashville, TN, who helped put me in touch with Bruce for this interview. Also, thanks again to Bruce for taking time from his hectic schedule to do this interview. -DJ


YOU WON'T BE ALONE. THREE OF YOUR FELLOWS FROM DEATH ROW WILL ACCOMPANY YOU.
LIKE YOU, IF THEY SURVIVE AND ARE SUCCESSFUL, THEY'LL BE GRANTED CLEMENCY.
I'M JUST NOT GETTIN' THROUGH TO YOU GUYS. THIS JOINT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CRACK! BELIEVE ME, I KNOW!
SIT DOWN, DIXON. DR. STANFORD?
RECENTLY A GROUP OF SCIENTISTS AT CORNELL, HAVE COMPLETED SOME EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIMENTS IN CELL-REINTEGRATION...
THAT IS, REARRANGING THE ATOMS OF THE HUMAN BODY, ALTERING THEIR STRUCTURE, THEIR SIZE. WE NOW BELIEVE IT POSSIBLE TO CHANGE THE PHYSICAL MAKE-UP OF A MAN INTO VIRTUALLY ANY FORM WE CHOOSE...
THIS IS HOW YOU'LL BE ENTERING THE CORELLO ESTATE, MR. DIXON...!
YOU'RE KIDDING! YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS? YOU CAN REALLY DO THAT--TURN MEN INTO BUGS?
SNIFF
EXCUSE ME, FELLAS, IT'S GETTING LATE AND I'VE GOT A BIG DAY TOMORROW. NICE TO MEET YA....

Script by Jones, art by Leo Duranova (with photo-backgrounds).

M.W. Kaluta: Master of Light and Shadows

Interview by Joseph McCabe

Joseph McCabe: I just read in your Program bio that you were an Air Force child.

M. W. Kaluta: Yes, I was. I was born in Guatemala in 1947. My mother had been in the Army—she was a nurse, a First Lieutenant—and my father a Captain at the time in the US Army Air Force. They were stationed in the Panama zone. Being born of American parents made me a naturalized U.S. citizen, but as my father liked to say, I couldn't be President of the United States because I wasn't born on U.S. soil. However, he'd add: I could certainly be the president of Guatemala—if I wanted to live for about three weeks! [Laughs.] Back then, in the mid-'40s they were knocking off *El Presidentes* like flies. It must have been the heat. Back then Guatemala was a volatile place for anybody in authority.

McCabe: Did you move frequently after that?

Kaluta: Yes, the family, (Father, Mother and two-year-old sister Joan) stayed in Guatemala for six months after I was born, then moved to Texas for a bit. From Texas to Louisiana, where my younger sister, Jean, was born (1949), and then on to Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. While we lived in Boston my father went over to fight in Korea (1951). It was 1955 when we moved to Pennsylvania, then '57 when we headed off to Montgomery, Alabama. We stayed there for a year so my dad could go to the US Air Force War College. By now he was a Major. Finally we moved to Virginia (1958) and that's where we stopped moving. My father became a Lt. Colonel, working in the Pentagon. He went off to his third war in 1965: Viet Nam. I spent that year working, between high school and college. Because we stayed there the longest and my two college years were in Virginia I think of myself as a Virginian.

McCabe: How did you become interested in art?

Kaluta: My interest in art as something I could do really came from the 1950s Jon Gnagy *Learn to Draw* TV show. It was in Alabama that I showed sufficient interest in that show for my dad to buy me one of the big art sets. It was the same kit that Jon Gnagy would use on his show.

McCabe: Were you a big comic book fan as a kid?

Kaluta: I was a comic book fan in that I read comic books. I was a comic book *reader*. I thought of comic book characters as real people, even if it was Baby Huey. I had no idea that comics were written or drawn by human beings. I read comic books until I got my first Tom Swift book. Then I started reading my sister's Nancy Drew books. I read those even more than the Tom Swift stuff. Then we all read the Hardy Boys stories. Since we moved nearly every year, we couldn't drag a lot of stuff with us so the books eventually disappeared along with a lot of now-collectable toys.

And comic books? The standard comic book memory is from Virginia. We were given the discards from relatives who bought every comic book for their children, *every* comic book. We got giant trash bags filled with comic books. We read and traded them. I can remember my mother saying, "Clean up those comic books or I'm going to throw them away." We didn't listen to her of course, and she really did throw them away. She apologizes for it now: "Oh, if only I'd known." I don't think we had any great comics that we really had to worry about losing, no *Action Comics* #1s or anything like that. Had I been a comic book *fan*, they would have been stacked up in my room and I would have tried to keep my sisters from reading them. As it was they were general kid property, which meant that nobody wanted to pick them up. So out they went!

When I finally moved to New York, thirty-odd years ago, I gave up moving. This is an Air Force child who is not going to be moved unless they come with a dump truck.

To answer the question, when I read comics what I read was *Baby Huey*, all the Archie Comics—*Lil' Hot Stuff*, *Chilly Willie*, *Our Army at War*, *Forbidden Worlds*, *Green Lantern*, *Superman*, *Jimmy Olsen* and *Lois Lane*. Lots of "no-name" comics with atrocious art, whatever I could find over at a pal's house, etc.

When I started collecting, I got some *Planet Comics*, some ECs, some *Police Comics* and *Plastic Man*, and a small armload of the digest-sized *Spirit* sections.

McCabe: What first got you into the comic book business?

Kaluta: The idea of doing comics at all? In junior high school I'd become a big fan of Edgar Rice Burroughs stories. I loved the illustrations on the Ace paperback covers and the line drawings on the inside title pages. Those images motivated me, along with whatever I'd learned from Jon Gnagy. I tried to copy those Frank Frazetta and Roy Krenkel

drawings and paintings. The thought crossed my mind that comics really were a series of illustrations put together in a line. That is *not* what comics are. I was still reading *Prince Valiant* in the Sunday paper so when I started doing a comic strip in college, I tried to emulate what I saw as the Harold Foster approach. What I did was really a stringing together of illustrations on top of a dumb story. I knew I wanted to draw somebody on Mars because of the Edgar Rice Burroughs books that had so inspired me, but I had no story to tell. I concentrated on the drawing. Take it from me—it is way "young."

I hung the pages in a local coffee shop—I blush at the temerity of that—but the work was seen by a local artist, Mike Cody, who knew another local guy, Tom Long, who was publishing a fanzine. Tom said, "Hey, we have a place for this type of art. It's really good. We have a place for this kind of stuff in our fanzine."

I had no idea what a fanzine was until Tom gave me a bunch of them from his collection. Tom was a big comics fan and had all the comics he'd ever had as a kid. Tom knew all the names of all the artists, a big Golden-Age comics fan. Along with the old comics, Tom also collected fanzines from as many places as possible: *Alter Ego*, *Trumpet*, *Amra*, etc. Getting the chance to have the material published gave me the energy and incentive to redraw everything. The second set of pages was a lot better, if not as naively expressive as the first. I did try to do things like render and crosshatch. It was very heavy-handed, but it looked pretty good compared to the earlier pages. The crowning moment at this juncture was when I got to do the cover of the first issue. *Graphic Showcase* number one…was a tag-team effort with Steve Harper helping with design ideas and reference, and even posing for a hand. As far as I recall either Tom or Jim Traynor did the excellent color work.

At the same time as the strip redo for *Graphic Showcase*, I was in contact with a gang of guys in Chicago: Rich Hauser and Helmut Muller. This other strip featured spaceship-type, Flash Gordon science fiction, as opposed to the *Graphic Showcase*'s Edgar Rice Burroughs science-fantasy type strip. Both of those strips, "Eyes of Mars" in Tom Long's fanzine and "The Hole in Space" in Rich Hauser's *SPA-FON*, were seen by Phil Seuling, *the* comics and conventions entrepreneur in New York City. He liked them and he showed them to Al Williamson, famed EC artist.

Now, what those gentlemen saw in that work I see no idea, because I really was not up to anybody's professional standards. But by 1968, I had talked to Al Williamson on the telephone and been sent an eight-page DC Comics script. Al told me, "Make it into twelve pages. Put as many dinosaurs, pretty girls and mushrooms with spots on them as you can in there! Make sure the guy is wearing boots!"

I sweated over these drawings and it shows, but not in the sense that the pages were any good. They were just sweaty.

By January of 1969, I went up to New York State to where Al lived. Once we went over what I'd done he used the layouts from maybe two panels from all the pages. One was of a fellow hiding underneath a fallen tree as cavemen walked past, and the other was of somebody crossing a tree that had fallen across a gorge, very much like a scene out of the *King Kong* movie.

In the few days that I was studying with Al, I learned more than I'd learned in all the years spent studying on my own. Al was a past-perfect professional. He really knew what he was doing, yet he didn't bludgeon me with techno-talk or make me feel like I was inadequate. He would say, "Look, I'm drawing the girl," and show me the photograph of the model he was using; then he drew it and inked it. It was absolutely, stunningly gorgeous. On that same page, over to the side there was going to be a big dinosaur, so Al quickly penciled where the dinosaur was supposed to be, and then said, "Give me a background."

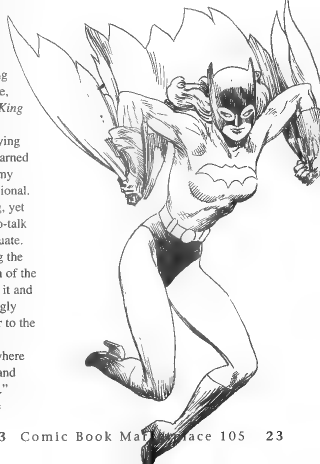
I drew the trees, drew this little temple that was in the story way in the background, drew a bunch of little shapes for mushrooms. Then Al said, "As the inker, I don't want to draw all those trees. Here's what we're going to do: draw the silhouette outline of the trees, then a black silhouette of the trees in front, then over here draw the bottoms of the trees, and a little above the tree trunks put in these sweeping lines. That will be fog. It will look like there are more trees there than we drew and it will give the whole scene atmosphere."

I was like, "Whoa, okay!" (Since that time, the spring of 1969, I've used that technique five- or six-hundred times.)

And then he said, "Okay, now ink it."

And I inked the temple, inked the trees and put in cross-hatching and the dots all over the mushrooms. When I look at that page now, I recognize everything I did. It glares. But nobody else would even notice: one panel background out of five on the page, one page out of a thirty-page comic.

Al said, "This is only an original." He showed me, through his professional approach, that the original is a step on the way to a

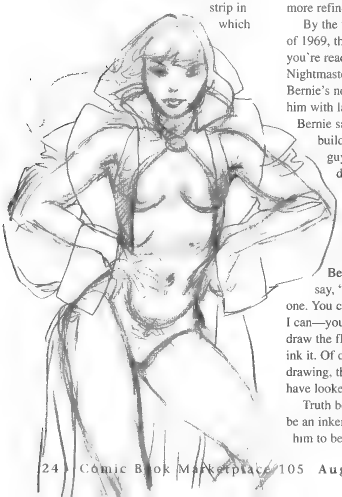


finished product, but not a slave to that product. He gave me words of wisdom, such as, "Draw for the original, don't draw for reproduction. Because if you draw for what's there, it can't be ruined when out of your hands. The production department can color it badly, the printer can misprint it, but because the drawing is strong it's going to hold up."

It took me a long time to learn to draw so that would happen, but Al set me off in the right direction, saving me years of fumbling in the dark.

While we were working on that DC job ("The Beautiful Beast" in an early issue of *House of Mystery*), Al was also doing the daily comic strip, *Secret Agent Corrigan*. I got to pose as some of the characters and I helped in finding reference. Al would say, "I need a tramp steamer. Why don't you go and find a photograph of a tramp steamer."

I never used reference. If I needed a tramp steamer, I'd just remember if I'd ever seen one and then fake it. Some of the faking would look pretty good, some of it looked really bad. But when doing a strip in which everything needed to look real to the viewer, reference was a necessity! Once I'd find the reference, we'd use light boxes and some opaque projection to get the best-possible looking strip, not in the least amount of time possible, but in less time than you'd think it would take.



McCabe: What first brought you to DC Comics?

Kaluta: I'd met Bernie Wrightson in 1967 at my first comic book convention. In 1968 he'd been asked by DC to come to New York City to work on a comic book [character] called Nightmaster. Bernie did the first issue in the fine-line style he'd developed at that time, and the editors realized he wasn't quite ready for a full book yet. Rather than give Nightmaster to somebody else, they put the book on hold, and gave Bernie a bunch of smaller stories in some of the new mystery books. During the next six months Bernie developed away from the crosshatch and fine line, and learned how to do things a little more abruptly, with dropped blacks, open backgrounds and more refined composition.

By the time I got to NYC, in January of 1969, they said, "Okay, we think you're ready now," and gave the Nightmaster book back to Bernie. Being Bernie's new roommate, I got to help him with layouts and backgrounds—Bernie said he'd rather not draw a building if he could be drawing a guy with muscles. I found drawing buildings a *lot* easier than drawing anyone with muscles. I didn't do the lion's share of the backgrounds, but I added a note here and there.

Every once and a while Bernie would get to a space and say, "There's a flying ship in this one. You can do a flying ship better than I can—you draw the flying ship." So I'd draw the flying ship, and Bernie would ink it. Of course it looked like a terrific drawing, though if I'd inked it, it would have looked a little flat and goofy.

Truth be told, DC *wanted* Bernie to be an inker; and Marvel certainly wanted him to be an inker. If he had had a family at that time perhaps we wouldn't have most of the great Wrightson stuff that we know and love: he would have had to start inking to make a living. Bernie was so good at inking he could make anybody's stuff look like gold; both Marvel and DC tried him out on a bunch of pencilers. The only person Bernie had a difficult time inking was Barry Windsor-Smith: their styles were so different. When Barry inked his own stuff, he made some unusual choices, but it had verve. When Bernie inked Barry the result wasn't good Bernie *or* good Barry. Marvel saw this team-up wasn't going to work; Bernie knew it wasn't going to work; and I'm sure Barry was horrified when he saw what Bernie was doing on top of his pencils. Barry put a lot of work into his pencils, and Bernie put a lot of work into his inks, but the finish came out looking like a dull third person.

McCabe: So Nightmaster was your first work for DC?

Kaluta: Nightmaster, with Bernie, was the first work, and what I did on that first book may have only been a little archway, or a little doorway, or a car, any number of little background things.

Al Williamson contacted Dick Giordano over at Charlton Comics. "There's this young guy, Kaluta. You gotta find him some work." While I was up at Al's for two weeks in the middle of winter Bernie called from New York: "Listen, you just got a five-page script from Charlton Comics." I flipped, I couldn't even believe it. Al said, "Go ahead, son, take off. Go do your work. This will keep."

So I went back to New York. I drew up these five pages, sweated over these pencils. The strip was about an old battle, Muslims versus Russians, or something similar. It was called "The Battle of Shiraz." It was a fill-in; it could go anywhere in their schedule where five pages were needed, and no deadline. I can't recall how long it took, but eventually I sent the pencils in (ten dollars a page for penciling and ten dollars a page for inking). I was waiting

for it to come back lettered—that's how they did it—you sent it in and it came back lettered and you inked it. Word came back from the Charlton offices: they'd lost the pencils—" Oh God, my great work!" [Laughs]

But they said, "While we're waiting, try *this* story," and they sent me a romance story. I read it, and I was blushing. I said, "I don't know how to do this stuff." I can't draw girls. I can draw horses sort of, and I can draw guys with swords, maybe, but drawing girls, especially modern girls in regular street clothes, is a tough thing to ask me to do."

Putting some of the lessons Al had taught me [to use], I collected a lot of photo reference and I tried it out. There may be two cute panels in this thing…. panels that are kind of nice, but I was not a good romance strip artist. After I penciled and inked and handed that job in they sent me a western story. Once I finished it, the horses looked okay, the over-all drawing was kind of okay, but it was quite obvious I wasn't a great western strip artist either.

All of the sudden they *found* the missing originals! They'd been sitting on them, hoping that I would be better at either the romance or the western. That's where their bread and butter was, romance and western comics. Science fiction, which we all wanted to do, wasn't making them that much money.

I inked those final five pages, sent them in, and that was the last work I was ever offered from Charlton. One reason was the editor I had dealt with moved to DC: Dick Giordano.

On my trips up to the DC offices with Bernie when he was delivering pages, I always tried to mention, "Tell Dick I'll work on anything he's got just laying around." Really, it sounds all too familiar, yes? The kid wants to work in the big time, hangs around hoping for a crumb to fall off the table...

...and then one day Bernie walked out and said, "Here. It's a two-page strip. Dick Giordano gave it to me for you." A two-page strip for DC? It was like giving me a golden ring! I was really gassed! Bernie and I walked the two or three miles back home with me on air, then I hit the board and sweated away on these two pages. Sweated and sweated. Man!

It was actually only one page and three quarters of another page; that was the strip. I took it into Dick weeks later. He sat me down (my first time inside the office doors), put a piece of tracing paper over the work and showed me all the places where I'd made mistakes, or if not mistakes, then bad decisions. Dick began to instruct me in the rudiments of storytelling, the backbone of comic book drawing. I came back after I changed everything. Dick said, "Okay, now ink it up." I inked it up, and he said, "Okay, that's fine." Now here's another two-pager."

I tried different things on this one. Still only two pages but I was choking. I really wasn't ready for anything close to The Big Time. In a terrific turn-about gesture, Bernie helped me out. Watching what Bernie did—camera shots and the quick way with which he could make a characterization—was intimidating, but also so educational. (That little strip: when I look I can see Wrightson all through it. He did most of the work while I absorbed his approach. In later years, even though we were roommates and worked in the same area of fantasy comics, our art never looked too similar. When we did monster stuff, mine was more drying-spider-webby and his was more dripping and gooey. But we shared our approaches and learned from each other.)

Then DC gave me a *third* two-page story; I don't remember anything about this one. I kept no copies and the thing was never printed.

However that last two-pager turned out, I was feeling pretty good by this point. Dick said, "I think you're ready for something bigger." He gave me a five-page "mummy's tomb" story, "The Coming of Gagman," and, oh, I went to town! Pulled out all the stops. Shot photos, came up with "concepts." When it was done, it wasn't great comics, but it was really good compared to anything I'd done before. Throwing away all my first ideas, I eventually came up with images of floating islands out in space, planet halos all over the place, and all these mummies flying, arcing through the sky. Not necessarily well-drawn, but it had *oomph*.

I found out some years later that a number of the editors were impressed with the over-all effect. It'd be interesting to know what the next step would have been, all things staying the same, but Dick Giordano, my one and only DC editor, went back to being a free-lance artist. He could stay at home like the rest of us and draw pictures. No need to commute! I didn't learn a lesson then, and I should have: never put all your eggs in one basket. I had one basket, and Dick G. was my only egg! Had I been thinking like a businessperson while up at DC I would have gone from editor to editor saying, "Hi. I'm M.W. Kaluta. Here's what I'm doing for Dick." Once Dick was gone, nobody knew who I was up at the offices.

Years passed. It wasn't until Joe Orlando came in and saw some of my older stuff, saw I was desperately trying to do good, that I started getting a little more work from DC.

But I wish I had learned my lesson then: make sure that other people know you're alive. Even as recently as two years ago this working quietly for one editor came to bite me in the butt. You're working for one person, and all of a sudden, for whatever reason, they're no longer there. No one else knows who you are.

McCabe: How long after your five-pager did *The Shadow* come about?

Kaluta: The three two-page stories and the five-page story all happened in 1969. From 1970 through 1972 there was somewhat of a recession. Bernie, Jeff Jones and I made most of our money from local NYC, Brooklyn and Queens fanzines at the time. Young men coming of age were getting money for their bar mitzvahs and, luckily for us, wanted to do fanzines. They would pay us maybe twenty-five dollars a page, which wasn't what DC had been paying, but it was more money than we could find at the time, anywhere. Those boys saved our hides! We also got to write our own stories, which none of us had tried since the old fanzine days.

By this time, I'd come to realize that a comic book story was nothing like illustrations tacked together: it had its own rules, this plastic storytelling medium. You could play with it, you could trick the reader, and you could astound the reader with an effect that didn't take four days to draw—like you might with an illustration—because you're playing with the concept of storytelling. Words and sound-effects, and especially thought balloons, really came into play, made a story that much more amazing. In these new fanzine days I got to come up with seven or eight little stories of my own, fairy tale-based, poetry-based, science fiction-based, and draw them up, just for myself, then they were published in the fanzines. I got a little bit of money for them, lots of thanks from the publishers and delight from the readers, as did all the other guys: it was pretty much "The M.W. Kaluta Show," "The Bernie Wrightson Show" and "The Jeff Jones Show." We'd all go to conventions in New York and we'd all get this attention from *our group* of people, because the fanzines were New York fanzines, the fans were New York fans, the conventions were run by New Yorkers and we were the New York artists.

During that time there were a couple of other types of companies that used comics-based work. One, a humor-publishing company, was trying to crack the *MAD* market and there were a couple of other, smaller comic-book companies: Atlas, Red Circle, Sol Brodsky's *Nightmare* and *Psycho* magazines. The company that made the biggest impact on my group of people—which was Bernie Wrightson, Jeff Jones, Bruce Jones, Ralph Reese and Dan Green—was this company called Major Magazines. They did a magazine called *Web of Horror*. The editor was a fellow named Terry Bisson who, these days, is thanked by people when they get their Academy Awards. At that time, he was a New York surfer-guy, a laid-back, happy-go-lucky editor editing this monster book for some people out on Long Island. Bernie did some of the first really primo work he ever did for Terry and *Web of Horror*; Jeff did covers for them. My first art piece was a big center-spread illustration—illustration was all I ever wanted to do to begin with. There were also five ten- or twenty-page stories, all in black-and-white, and, though still slow and halting in my efforts, I was able to learn and expand my abilities. Major Magazines may have been paying as much as forty dollars a finished page. Unless you worked every day, you couldn't make family-raising money; but, luckily, I wasn't raising a family. It was all fantasy, all fun. I did some really good work that I enjoyed. It still looks very primitive, when I look at it now, but there were things I did there I no longer do, one of which was use the brush to put real, meaty weight on to the pages, something that would eventually translate into *The Shadow*. But between *The Shadow* and now, I've gone almost entirely pen—which doesn't have a weight line at all—it's just a holding line, with color making the weight, a different look and feel. But back then I was throwing the brush around on very big pages.

With those *Web of Horror* originals, and the five-page story for DC, which still hadn't seen print, I was able to go to some of the bigger publishers and impress them, not with my drawing, but with my design and technique. Various companies gave me a few jobs, and the few jobs I did for these people were *the* best jobs I'd done up to that point. One especially had a very good story by a fellow named Chuck McNaugton with terrific layouts by Rich Buckler. I followed these slavishly, and I did the work using better paper. I did some better drawing, more sophisticated storytelling and some really nice stuff that, once finished, I would show to Joe Orlando when I eventually worked my nerve up to go back to DC.

The door at DC opened wide that next time. One reason was because they'd just started putting out a lot more mystery and science-fiction comics, ensemble books where one single artist didn't have to do a whole book. You didn't have to be a real "somebody" to get a six-page story done.

I got into the door at DC at exactly the right time: they'd just got the Edgar Rice Burroughs contract that had been over at Gold Key for *years*. Because the DC editors were old comics guys themselves, they were delighted to carve *[continued on page 64]*

Scott Hampton: A Great with Brushes

Interview by Dan Johnson

North Carolina based artist Scott Hampton is one of the leaders in the world of painted comics. His work has graced stories from such master story-tellers of the horror, science fiction and fantasy genres as Clive Barker to Neil Gaiman to Robert E. Howard, all in a career that spans over twenty years and such major companies (both past and present) as DC, Marvel, Eclipse and Pacific.

As impressive as Scott's artwork is, what struck me even more than his talent is his approachability when it came to discussing his work. You couldn't ask for a friendlier person to sit and shoot the breeze with about comics, painting and the priceless childhood memory that was created when you tried to stay up late and catch a glimpse of Shock Theater *as a kid. His talent alone makes it an honor to introduce Scott Hampton to you readers, but his personality makes it a pleasure as well.*

Comic Book Marketplace: First off, tell us a bit of your background. What was it that got you into comics?

Scott Hampton: I grew up in the South, starting with High Point, NC where I was born, then moved to Myrtle Beach, SC, then finally Columbia, SC. My brother, Bo, was the one that turned me on to comics. He was looking at them and drawing them. I was five years Bo's junior, so whatever Bo did, I tried to do as well.

CBM: What were some of the titles that first turned you on to comics?

Hampton: I remember the first comic I ever bought was a *Spider-Man*. It was an issue where Spider-Man was dealing with the Lizard. I'm pretty sure it was a John Romita cover and probably his interiors as well. I'd say this was somewhere on the order of 1968. It was after Ditko, but it was not long after.

CBM: What were some of your other influences outside of comics? What turned you on to the horror genre?

Hampton: One of the things I had known about, but could never stay up late enough to see, was a thing called *Shock Theater*. In the '60s, I wanted to stay up and see it, and I never could. I got special dispensation in the summer to stay up late enough. The problem was I would always conk out before it came on or just after it started because I was always so tired. I remember one time being allowed to stay up late enough to watch it and *The Haunting* came on, and I saw it up to the point where the main character, Dr. Markway (played by Richard Johnson), is telling the history of the house and one of the characters ends up hanging herself—I remember that image and being scared by that—and then I fell asleep. For ten or fourteen years, I was never able to see that movie again (this was in the days before cable and video), so I had to wait for my opportunity. One day it came that I could see it again and this time I actually stayed up and was blown away by [the film]. This was when I was in my early to mid-twenties and by that time I had read quite a bit of horror and had gotten very much involved with the horror genre.

One of the things that really got me going on horror, in fact, I know the main thing that happened to me that got me going was winning a class game. My English teacher had a puzzle and she said the first boy and the first girl in the class [who solved it] would both win a prize of one of the books that she had. The whole class was doing these puzzles. A little girl won first and I came in second, I was the first boy [to solve the puzzle] and she gave me ten or so books to choose from. And I saw this one that had this cover of a dead body coming out of a refrigerator in pieces in wrapping paper or something and crawling across the floor. I was so riveted by that, that I said, "I'll take this one." I went home and read this book over the next few days and there were a bunch of Robert Bloch short stories. I totally got hooked, and that must have been around 1971 or so.

CBM: What got you interested in the idea of painting your books instead of doing classic illustrating?

Hampton: I had been inspired to start painting in watercolor very early on when I started seeing Frazetta covers coming out from Ballantine paperbacks and Jeff Jones covers. Then when Bernie Wrightson and the guys from the studios started putting out posters, I was constantly inspired to play with color. I had a lot of color in my portfolio, but when I first was showing my work around, the editors really wanted to see continuity.

CBM: In regards to Frazetta, what was it about his work that influenced your decision to become an artist and how did he influence your style?

Hampton: The earliest person's style I recognized was Steranko's. Then my brother, Bo, started picking up the Conan paperbacks and bringing them home and Frazetta was the second artist whose art I recognized. This was from his paintings, I didn't see his pen and ink work until later. It was 1971 or 1972 when I first started really looking at Frazetta. I was very conscious of his drawing choices and I

was very influenced by his subject matter as well. I was a huge fan of [Frazetta], I love his stuff.

CBM: These days it's not that uncommon to see painted books out on the shelf. It's not the rarity that it used to be. I think that it can be a good thing as it can sometimes let the personality of the artist come through clearer than classic illustration.

Hampton: It can be a double-edged sword. I've seen painted comics where they didn't work at all. They look like postcards and they seem staged and don't seem real. I've also seen painted comics with art that was ultra-convincing of their own reality and extremely effective. Comics have been playing with it in terms of how to tell a story through paint since the [Pacific] years. Little by little it is starting to come clearer when [painted comics] work and when it really doesn't and when to use it and when not. The problem that I have is that [with painted comics], to be good story-telling, you need to know when to stop involving the reader in eye-candy. Sometimes you need to pull back and be restrained and make sure that the reader is looking at it and reading it at the right speed and not dwelling on [the art]. There's also the fact the story itself requires a certain amount of you stepping back from the work and not saying, "Look at me, look what I can do."

CBM: As an artist you are very lucky that you have had a chance to adapt either some really great writers or have done stories for some truly great writers. Let's talk about some of them for a moment. How did you come to be a fan of Robert E. Howard?

Hampton: I [knew Howard], of course, through Conan, but I didn't know about his horror material until I went to live in New York for about a year. I was roommates with George Pratt. George turned me on to *Pigeons from Hell*. He said that I should read it, it was the scariest story he had ever come across. He gave me a paperback that had, I think, Jeff Jones illustrations. Anyway, I read this novella and was just blown away by it and had to agree with George that it was probably the scariest story I had read. By that time I was a fan of classic ghost stories and I had been going very far into that genre, so I was very caught up in that and the particular charming qualities of that genre and [*Pigeons from Hell*] came totally out of the blue for me. I hadn't been reading much horror that was quite as strong as this, so it really blew my doors off. It was that night that I announced to George that I was going to turn this into a graphic novel.

CBM: What was your biggest challenge in adapting the story into a graphic novel?

Hampton: I think the biggest challenge was a sequence where the character is thrown into darkness and he has to run what he thinks is a dark road and then slowly he starts to see some light and see the suggestion of steps and he kind of comes out of a dream-like blackness to realize that he isn't running down a road having left the house, but rather is walking up the staircase and is probably about to get his brains chopped up. That's one of the scariest moments in the book and finding a way to show that, visually, was a very big question mark for me. The answer I came up with was mismanaged in the graphic novel adaptation that I did. What had been a black page with white outlines of panel borders then became a white page. There's this abrupt change from black to white and it didn't work. It was supposed to be black all the way through to the point where you finally could see light coming through and [the character] comes up out of the thing. That

...an old-fashioned intro.
It was easy tracing my way back, following the death-pattern of a wounded planet.
CLIVE NOW, CHOSEN ONES, WE... ABIDE ON HIGH AS THE OLD WORLD DIES.
WE'LL INHERIT A NEW WORLD...
YHIPI!

was the only problem I had with the book, which was published by Eclipse, and I then realized I would one day reprint it and I would fix that. I'm planning to do that very soon. I have a project set up to take advantage of [reprinting] that and a bunch of other horror material I've done and new stuff that I'm doing. I'm putting it all together as one big volume.

CBM: This other material that will be printed with *Pigeons from Hell*, is this material you have written yourself or other adaptations?

Hampton: Some of it. I'll take *Pigeons from Hell* and put that in there. [There's] a graphic novella I wrote called *The Unturned Stone*, I'll put that in there. [There will] also be some short stories that I did, including one that I wrote sort of in a vein of classic ghost stories called "The Revenant." Plus I'll be putting in a Hellraiser story that Clive Barker was kind enough to give us permission to use and also a bunch of adaptations of classic ghost stories. W.W. Jacobs wrote "The Monkey's Paw" and I'm adapting that. Plus two other stories, so that will be about fifty pages of new material. Then there's some illustration of actual text material. [These] are ghost stories I will do illustrations for. Those along with the new material and the reprint material will come to about 250-275 pages. I'm calling it *Spookhouse*. We're hoping for an early spring release next year. This will be through IDW, Ideas and Designs Works.

CBM: Let's backtrack a bit to your origins in the field. How did you make your leap into comics?

Hampton: My brother and I had shown our work to people over the course of two or three years. I was making trips to New York. I was either visiting Bo or going to the School of Visual Arts at the time, somehow I would be in New York and I would call [companies] ahead of time and try and set up to see an editor. I did that for two years in a row and I saw Archie Goodwin and I saw John Workman and a couple of others over the course of that period and they kept telling me they liked the look of my art, but I wasn't showing them any continuity. I only had illustrations in my portfolio. Finally, I did get some continuity in there, albeit not your ordinary continuity. I adapted a scary Grimm's Fairy Tale called "Godfather Death." I showed that to Archie Goodwin. I also showed it to a couple of other people, Bill Dubay at Warren magazines—just before they folded—and Joe Orlando and the folks at DC and that's when I broke into comics.

CBM: Was your first work at *Epic Illustrated*?

Hampton: That was right around the same time as a couple of other things, but that was the very beginning of my on-going career in comics. From that day on, I've been working non-stop in comics. I did have one or two little things come out before [the *Epic Illustrated* work].

CBM: Now what about *Twisted Tales* and *Alien Worlds*? How did you get involved with Bruce Jones' books over at Pacific?

Hampton: That same summer that my brother and I came to New York to make our living in the field, there was a New York show, I guess it was 1981, and Steve Schanes was there with Pacific and I had become aware of them because they had a

few comics out by that time, only two or three. So I knew of them and their company and I also knew they were putting out some really nice looking comics. I had my portfolio, and by that time I already had some work from Marvel in there, so I showed him the work, which he liked, and he wanted to hook me up with Bruce Jones who was just starting the horror book. I got a call later on, I think it was three or four days later, from Bruce Jones. He offered me a script for the *Alien Worlds* comic and I did that story. After I did that story, they offered me a series called *Silverheels* which I did for three issues. Thereafter, Pacific folded.

CBM: I was always amazed at the degree of talent that Bruce was able to pull in for those books.

Hampton: The thing that's funny is it very much followed a pattern. In the 1950s, at a time when no one really had any opportunities to do material that was really good for decent pay, Bill Gaines came out with the EC line and it was a magnet for all the best artists. When they folded in 1955, it was almost ten years later that Jim Warren comes out with *Creepy* and *Eerie*. That's an opportunity for all those people who hadn't had a chance to show what they could do, in the way of horror material, to get their chance again. Then in the late 1970s, early 1980s, Warren finally kicks the bucket (but they had long before that lost their real momentum). Then filling that void is Bruce Jones. Richard Corben, Bernie Wrightson and all these people have stories to tell yet, but there weren't that many venues. So when Bruce comes along and says, "Look, I'm going to do this book, I have a whole lot of friends in the field, I'm going to draw on all of them and they're all going to give me their best work." And when there hasn't been anything around for a while, you'll always get the artist's very best work.

CBM: What about Archie Goodwin? You mentioned him before as one of the people you first showed your artwork to. You also worked with Archie on the Batman graphic novel, *Night Cries*. Tell us about him.

Hampton: I was a huge fan of the Warren comics and Archie's stories. When I first came into comics, I sought him out because I always wanted to work with him. As editor I worked with him on a number of occasions, but I really did want to get the chance to have him write something for me. Of course, I wasn't going to go, "Hey could you write me a little issue or something?" No, I've got to come to him with this big graphic novel idea, one hundred pages or whatever. I came to him with that idea and, happily for me, he really liked it and really fleshed it out. That's probably the proudest comics moment I have is having worked with him.

CBM: At one of the comic book shows I attended in college I got the chance to meet Archie. Getting the chance to speak with him was great. It just stunned me that I could go and talk to one of the living legends of comics, and he was such a nice guy.

Hampton: Exactly. He had quite the reputation for being the nicest guy in comics, which I will certainly agree with. His being nice didn't in any way keep him from being perhaps the most acute editor I've ever known. He was absolutely conscious of every aspect of what made a comic book. If he ever came to you and wanted to change something, there was always a good reason for it. He wouldn't meddle with you unless it needed it. He knew when to jump in there and ask for changes. He was a very on-target editor, in no way a hands-on editor. He wasn't a frustrated creator, he was not that. He was very conscious of his place in comics and he knew he was one of the best writers in the field and one of the best creators. He didn't have to fiddle with you or get his hands wet with your work to feel creative. He had enough outlets. He had all he needed.

CBM: So the Batman graphic novel, you came up with the idea and approached Archie with it?

Hampton: Yeah, and then he fleshed it out and made it a more multi-layered story. Then of course he wrote the thing and added the hinging points of realism that were either going to make it work or not. I was just astounded by that. Archie would give me pages in small batches, three to five pages, and then he would expect me to go away for months on end. So I learned very quickly, when I was a week away from finishing [the pages], I should call him and say, "I'm done. I'm sitting here. I'm starving. I'm twiddling my thumbs. I need pages." So then he would get me more pages. But if I just waited until I was at that point, I really would have to wait. Archie at that point had a lot on his plate. He was very busy. I had a great time working on that project. At the time, I had never really worked on anything that big. But getting to work with Archie, and the fact the pages came in small dribbles, helped to keep it from seeming like it was overwhelming.

CBM: The Batman graphic novel was also your first time tackling a mainstream character, correct?

Hampton: It was the first time. I had spent all my time up until then doing stuff for Pacific and Eclipse and the other independents. I had done a little bit of work with Marvel for *Epic Illustrated* and for DC with their *New Talent Showcase* comic book, but I had never really dealt with any super-hero characters. That was my first time doing that.

CBM: Was it an experience you enjoyed?

Hampton: Oh, very much. Getting to the point of where I wanted to proceed with [Batman], it really became a fun project.

CBM: Tell us about your experience working on the Clive Barker comics.

Hampton: I got hooked into the Barker material that was being done at Eclipse through the fellow who came to Eclipse with Barker in hand, a guy named Chuck Wagner. Wagner was a very good writer in his own right and he had gotten Clive to go along and adapt some of the stories from *Books of Blood* into comics.

Chuck Wagner gave me a call and got me onboard with that. Then I was talking with Dan Chichester at Marvel when he was just starting up his *Hellraiser* comic. He wanted me to get involved with that as well. This all became the Clive Barker period.

CBM: I love the fact that Barker goes beyond the written word, both as an artist and as a filmmaker. He is a very visually driven creator, I think. I like the fact that he is the kind of person from whom you really get a sense of what is in his mind's eye. Was that something that you felt was a challenge, adapting the work of someone who is such a talented artist himself?

Hampton: Well, no. It was never a problem and that was more to his credit than anyone else. He is so visual and so good at telling you what [he sees], he doesn't really leave you with a great deal of room to guess at what he's getting at. I feel like the visual I'm getting is very similar to the visual most people are get from him. He's not as easy to misinterpret as some other people. That was a favorable situation, the fact that also if he wasn't explicatively clear about what his visuals were, you also could sense from the way he approached the work that he was very much in fact a visualist. I always sensed that, if there is room for me to interpret this visually, what I come up with would probably be cool for him. So, I wasn't concerned that he wouldn't like what he was seeing. I've never actually gotten the chance to speak with him, but I've dealt with his materials and I've heard back from people who have said, "Oh, I saw Clive Barker and he said this about you or whatever." He's a very generous person, from that I can tell. It was a lot of fun working on his material. I really admire him as a writer.

CBM: What about Neil Gaiman and *Books of Magic*?

Hampton: Neil was incredibly pleasant to work with. He was very open to the one time I kind of boxed him into a corner with his script. The way the script came to me was Neil would write, "The two characters are walking along a street of New York" and then you will get two-and-a-half pages of dialogue and, "They end up at Zatanna's house." It wasn't over-written in terms of telling you what was where and what was going on. And it wasn't written as a page-by-page sort of script, it was basically a run-on sort of thing. I got to paint it the way I wanted to. Then there came a point at the end where I told the editor, Karen Berger, that I was either going to have to do ten panel pages or we were going to have to cut something. She contacted Neil, and Neil called me and we talked about it. He said let's cut out the scene where Tim and the other character arrive with that guy coming into San Francisco and I go, "No, no, no! I want to keep that! It's got the Golden Gate Bridge! I've got a great shot of that I want to do." So we looked around for other things to possibly cut. A lot of writers would go, "Screw that! I want to keep every blinking word!" So, [Neil] was very cool [about compromising on that].

CBM: Now what about your work with David Brin, the gentleman you did the *Star Trek: The Next Generation: Forgiveness* graphic novel with? How did that project come about?

Hampton: Jeff Marriott just called me out of the blue one day and said that he had a script and wanted to invite me into doing it. It was as simple as that, basically. I hadn't done Star Trek before, so of course I talked to him about it and he calmed some of my fears. I've heard nightmare stories about how Paramount can be very difficult and picky, especially with the likenesses and all of that. He was able to convince me that it wouldn't be a problem. [The story] was a lot of fun and I really wanted to do the project once I read the script by David because it was really a lark of a story and I just really had a good time with it. For my money, I wish they could have managed to work it out where it was a story for the classic *Star Trek* cast, Shatner, Nimoy and those guys. That's the stuff that I like and that's the stuff I remember and have a fondness for.

CBM: Are you at liberty to speak of the project you are working on at this time with David Brin?

Hampton: Sure, this one's called *The Life Eaters*. He took a story he wrote in the 1980s called "Thor Meets Captain America" and the title would make you think it's about super-heroes and it's not. It's set in World War II and it's an alternate history where the Nazis use their concentration camps and the murdering of the Jews as a means to cast a necromantic spell to bring the Nordic gods down to Earth and cause them to help with the war, which they do. That's the basis for the story, that Thor, Loki and Odin are helping the Nazis take over the world. That initial story is the first thirty-five to forty pages of the storyline. From that point on, David has created a whole multi-layered story that winds up through the years, through the Vietnam War era and takes on lots of different dimensions. Other gods are brought into the situation and it's a titanic, world-wide struggle and the poor human race got caught in the middle. It's the biggest job I've ever done. I think [Wildstorm] is going to have it come out as a 150-page graphic novel hardback in October. It's a very serious story and it makes a very strong statement. Working closely with David on it and getting to know how he thinks about these things is really a pleasure. I think it may be the best work I've ever done in comics.

Before we ended our conversation, Scott also mentioned that his adaptation of the story of Adam and Eve from The Bible *should be out in October from Avatar as well. This was done with Dave Elliot and was originally serialized in* Penthouse.

Special thanks to John Hitchcock of Parts Unknown Comics in Greensboro, NC. John helped to introduce me to Scott's work many, many moons ago and also allowed me to come in and bug his guests for interviews at his convention last October. Without him, I doubt this interview would have ever been possible.

WRIGHTSON

MASTER OF THE MACABRE

Interview by Michael Kronenberg

In the shadow of the Golden Age of horror movies, EC Comics, and the paperback covers of Frank Frazetta, the seeds of inspiration started to grow in Bernie Wrightson. From his home in Baltimore, Md., he moved to New York City and found success at DC Comics, producing beautiful and horrific work for such titles as House of Mystery *and* House of Secrets. *Soon afterward, Wrightson and writer Len Wein redefined the monster comic book with their groundbreaking run on* Swamp Thing.

After a successful stint at adapting such literary luminaries as Lovecraft and Poe for Creepy *and* Eerie *magazines, Bernie tackled his lifelong obsession with Mary Shelley's* Frankenstein. *Following the successful release of several portfolios of his* Frankenstein *illustrations and years of hard work, this beautiful tome combining Shelley's words and Wrightson's astonishing drawings was released in 1983 by Marvel.*

From the mid to late seventies Wrightson, along with standout artists Jeff Jones, Barry Smith and Michael Kaluta moved into a shared working space and formed "The Studio." There, Wrightson produced a series of beautiful paintings, with subjects ranging from Poe and Conan to Dinosaurs and serial killers.

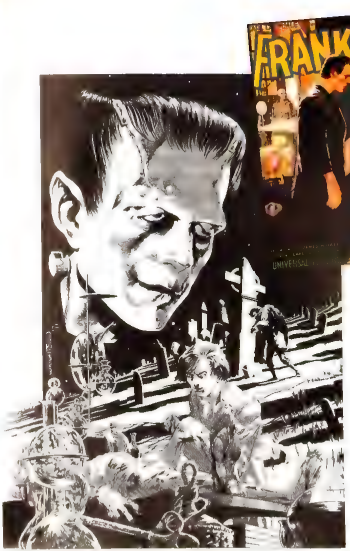
In the eighties and nineties Wrightson returned to the comics field with such projects as Batman: The Cult *and* Batman/Aliens *for DC, Captain Sternn for* Heavy Metal, *and* The Punisher: War Journal *for Marvel. At the same time Wrightson began his work in movies. Contributing to both* Ghostbusters *films,* Galaxy Quest, *and* Spider-Man, *among others. CBM caught up with Bernie, who is in the process of working on* Blade 3 *and a feature film or TV version of his creation* Captain Sternn.

Comic Book Marketplace: How did Frazetta's explosion on the scene in the early '60s influence you to become an artist and how did that influence your style?

Bernie Wrightson: Oh my gosh. Probably as long as I can remember...something I learned, like monsters and things. When I saw Frazetta's stuff it was like somebody pulled a veil from over my eyes. I saw the stuff and I said, "This is how to do it. This is just the way to draw." I'd been influenced before by comic books, EC comics, when I was a kid—Graham Ingels, Jack Davis, Johnny Craig, Al Williamson, and all those guys. I didn't even know their names when I saw their work, but I guess all that stuff kind of came together. Early on I tried copying Frazetta to the best of my ability, which wasn't very well. But over time I guess I just mixed that with all the other influences and came up with my own methods and the style that I have.

CBM: Which is uniquely your own.

Wrightson: I guess it is. I have to really strongly credit my influences. I wouldn't be doing this now if it weren't for them. Frazetta, well, all those guys. I came along at the precise right time; I was the right age to see that and to be very taken with it and



An early Frankenstein drawing by Bernie, showing the influence of the 1931 film starring Boris Karloff. INSET: The six-sheet to the James Whale classic.

excited about it. I think back on it, if that had come along just a few years later it probably wouldn't have mattered.

Cover to *House of Secrets* #100 (Sept. 1974), art: Bernie Wrightson.

CBM: Your first successes were in the fanzines and in privately produced portfolios. When did you decide to go into mainstream comics?

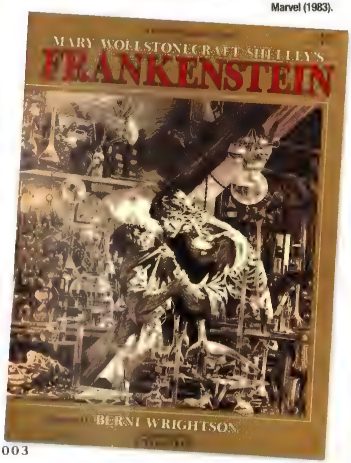
Wrightson: I did a few things for fanzines, but I actually started working for professional comics pretty early. I started working in comics in 1968, but I don't think anything was published until 1969.

CBM: Who was the first to publish you?

Wrightson: Oh, it was DC. I did stuff for the *House of Mystery*. At the time they were doing these things called fillers, and they were two or three pages of whatever they needed to fill out the comic book. Because at the time their ad space was restricted to a certain number of pages and they had to make the rest up with content. It's not like it is now where it seems like half the comic book is advertising.

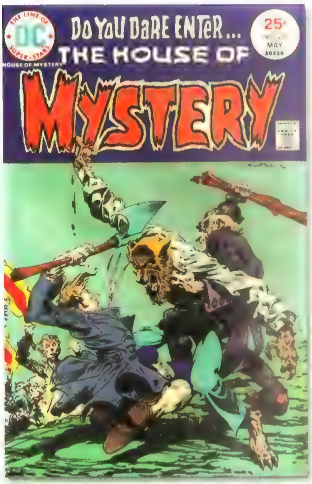
CBM: Can you tell us about the *Frankenstein* book and the portfolios? You seem obsessed with the subject.

Wrightson: Well, I guess I've always been obsessed with Frankenstein. I saw the original 1931 Boris Karloff *Frankenstein* on TV when I was a kid. Again, that was like being in the right place at the right time. It really took hold of my mind and I became very fascinated with the movie and eventually reading the book when I was 10 or 12 years old. I don't think I even got through it the first time; I tried, but it was just so different from what I was expecting. It was a bear to get through—it is really not a terribly well written book. Trying to wade through it was a real chore. It was a few years before I actually picked it up again and read it and actually finished. I felt that the book wasn't as good as the movie, so I put it away and forgot about it. Eventually I picked it up



Cover to Shelley and Wrightson's *Frankenstein*, published by Marvel (1983).

Cover to *House of Mystery* #204 (July 1972), art: Bernie Wrightson.



Cover to *House of Mystery* #231 (May 1974), art: Bernie Wrightson.

again and read it for the third or fourth time. Each time I read it I found something more, there was another layer there, that this is actually a really good story, it's really saying something. The writing is kind of clunky and old fashioned, but that's just the surface or how it's presented. The ideas behind the book were just really striking. For a long time I thought about adapting the book as a comic book—what we call graphic novels now—but that never really seemed to go anywhere. At some point I thought rather than adapt this story and diminish it by trying to hammer it around to fit some other medium, why not just illustrate the novel itself. That's where it started. I couldn't give you a real time line on that because I know I had this stewing in the back of my mind for a few years before I actually started to do it.

CBM: You put out the portfolios quite a bit of time before the book was released, and I assume trying to get the book published is a story in itself.

Wrightson: Well, my first thought was that I wanted to self-publish. It was never an option to me to go to a publisher with this and say, "Okay, look, I want to do this very opulently illustrated edition of *Frankenstein*. And I want to do all the illustrations in pen and ink and it's all going to be in black and white and it'll look like woodcuts." And then have the publisher say, "Oh, this sounds like a good idea, but we want color paintings," and want this and want that. I'd been working in comics and publishing for a few years and I knew well enough that you're pretty much at the mercy of the people that are paying. I thought, "I'm not going to do that with this. I'm going to do this on my own time with my own dime. I'm going to do it the way I want it, and when it's all done I'll find somebody to publish it or I'll publish it myself." That was the idea behind the portfolios—a way to finance getting the book published. Of course, it didn't work that way. I printed the portfolios and I sold them, and then the money needed to go to bills and food and taxes and other things. Before you know it, the money's gone. And I still haven't gotten the book finished. I just decided to stop thinking about that. The important thing is to get the book done and I'll worry about getting it published when all the drawings are done. It was six or seven years, I think, that I did the illustrations from time to time. Whenever I had a week or two between paying jobs I would work on a Frankenstein drawing. Sometimes for longer than that until I really needed the money and I'd have to find a paying job. It took a while but I did manage to do it the way I wanted.

Our first close-up view of what Alec Holland has become, from page 15 of *Swamp Thing* #1 (Nov. 1972), art: Bernie Wrightson.

CBM: The only time it was published was the Marvel trade paperback, right?

Wrightson: No, there is a second edition. Eventually I want to do a subsequent edition and retool it a little bit—not do any new work for it necessarily, but just redesign it.

CBM: So how much influence were the old Universal horror films and did you watch *Shock Theater* while you were growing up in Baltimore?

Wrightson: Absolutely. We had a host named Dr. Lucifer who was played by an old B actor named Richard Vicks who used to be in old westerns. Everybody was a rip-off of Zacherley—I think Zach was the first guy to do it. Living in Baltimore, sometimes if the weather was just right and it was raining and the signal bounced off the clouds in just the right direction I could pick up Zacherley from Philadelphia—but it would come in with a lot of snow and static. But our guy was Dr. Lucifer. Yeah, *Shock Theater*, I think Friday or Saturday night at 11:00 or 11:30, and they had the standard personalities—Frankenstein, Wolfman, the Mummy. I was crazy about those movies. It was great stuff and I bought every issue of *Famous Monsters*.

Cover to *Swamp Thing* #2 (Jan. 1973), art: Bernie Wrightson.

Cover to *Swamp Thing* #5 (Aug. 1973), art: Bernie Wrightson.

Cover to *House of Secrets* #92 (July 1971), the first appearence of Wein and Wrightson's Swamp Thing, art: Bernie Wrightson.

CBM: And *Famous Monsters* was great to get just for the Basil Gogos covers.

Wrightson: Oh, yeah. Inside were great photos, background, and stuff about the actors. I think maybe my favorite was *Castle of Frankenstein*. It didn't last very long, but it was just packed, the print was tiny and they just filled those pages with information.

CBM: Do you have a favorite piece, something you're really proud of?

continued on page 61

The quintessential Wrightson Batman, from *Swamp Thing* #7 (Dec. 1973), art: Bernie Wrightson.

The Ninety Years of Liberty Gala: A Night in Pictures

by Stacia Brown

From the lobby's Trevi Fountain replica, strategically placed by the door, inviting guests to cast coins and wishes into its beautiful base, to the lavish, silver-frosted chocolate cake molded into a three-dimensional 1913 Liberty Head dessert and surrounded by a moat of milk chocolates wrapped in 1913 Liberty Head nickel-imprinted foils, the coin reception, hosted by Legend Numismatics and Diamond International Galleries, in cooperation with American Numismatic Association and the Smithsonian's National Museum of History, and held Tuesday night (July 29), was heralded by all in attendance as the gala of the summer. The reception marked the first reuniting of the four 1913 Liberty Head nickels in 60 years and their first public showing in 80 years. Together, the four coins are valued at more than $10.5 million.

Steve Geppi presents D. David Bowers, who announced the sale of Dwight Manley's nickel for approximately $3 million.

The event began at 7 p.m., though several attendees arrived early to casually peruse the breathtaking beauty of the gallery. Part of what they found on display were some of the most enviable items in Steve Geppi's seemingly bottomless collection of rare first edition comics, though noted collector Dave Anderson and his son, Adam also displayed some of their high-grade wonders. The books on display included *Action Comics* #1 (which features the first appearance of Superman), *Detective Comics* #27 (first Batman appearance) *Marvel Comics* #1 (first Human Torch appearance), *Captain America Comics* #1 (first Captain America appearance), *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (first Spider-Man appearance), and *Daredevil* #1 (first Daredevil appearance).

But the real comics star on display could be found in many original Carl Barks paintings, owned by Kerby Confer and Steve Geppi. As the night progressed, Disney's Uncle Scrooge became quite the vocal spokes-duck for the evening's event-even though he never actually quacked a word.

It would be another hour yet before anyone unfamiliar with the filthy rich quacker would make the connection between him and the 1913 Liberty Head nickels. During that hour, the approximately 250 congregants milled about, surfeiting the sumptuous fare and casually conversing, careful not to address the elephant in the elegant.

Bill Withuhn - Curator, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Dr. Brent Glass - Director, Smithsonian National Museum of American History and Valeska Hilbig - Senior Public Affairs Associate, Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

The breathtaking display of four 1913 Liberty Head nickels.

From left to right: Steve Geppi, Laura Sperber, Christine Karstedt, John Snyder and Bruce Morelan celebrate in the renowned Diamond International Galleries library.

First issues of *Action Comics, Marvel Comics, Captain America, The Human Torch* and *Detective Comics* #27.

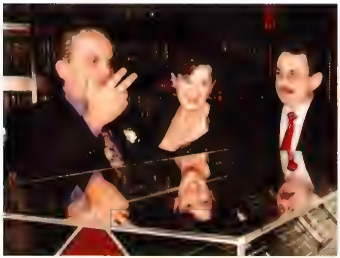
art-filled room: the fact that their collective wealth quite probably amounts to multiple billions. Among the luminaries in attendance were two Maryland Congressmen - Ben Cardin and C.A. "Dutch" Ruppersberger, Lou and Nancy Grasmick (Maryland State Superintendent of Schools), John Pateraklis (owner of H&S Bakery and H&S Properties), Henry Rosenberg (CEO of Crown Central Petroleum), Ted and Jonell Hake of Hake's Collectibles, CEO of Ripken Baseball Chris Flannery, PR Director for Ripkin Baseball John Maroon, Ripken Baseball board member Roger Ralph, Ray Schulte of Schulte Sports Marketing, Bill Jemas, President of Marvel Comics, Babe Ruth Museum chairman Bob Hillman and his wife, Sandy, and Orioles majority owner Peter Angelos. Also among the attendees were WJZ-TV Morning Show hosts Marty Bass and Don Scott and news anchor Vic Carter; Baltimore Sun columnist Michael Olesker, Mary Counts of Whitman Publishing, Random House editor Dorothy Harris, and Beth Deisher from Coin World.

Finally, as 8 o'clock rolled around, co-host and emcee Steve Geppi graced the podium and proceeded to thank everyone for visiting his "la-la land" and to explain the clever Uncle Scrooge tie-in. "Uncle Scrooge is the quintessential coin collector. Who better to showcase on a night that honors these legendary coins?" Geppi's opening remarks segued into an introduction of Aris Melissaratos, Secretary of the Department of Business and Economic Development in the office of Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich, who read a proclamation from the governor, which declared July 27 - August 3 "World Money Week in Maryland." Melissaratos noted the reception as a masterful "blending of art and wealth" and commended the event coordinators for making such a unique and significant connection.

Next Geppi introduced coin industry sage Q. David Bowers, who graciously shed a bit of light on the upcoming

Orioles majority owner Peter Angelos and Steve Geppi.

Kerby Confer (shown here) also showcased his block of rare "Inverted Flying Jenny" stamps at the event.



Steve Geppi explains the history of the coins to Carol Overstreet and Brian Ott of Certified Rarities.

Gemstone's John K. Snyder, renowned sports agent Dwight Manley and award-winning columnist and author Q. David Bowers.

unveiling, as well as the significance of Diamond International Galleries' participation in the momentous occasion. Bowers referred to Geppi's art accumulation as "the comics equivalent of the Eliasberg [coin] Collection." Bowers went on to prove that the coin tricks and surprises of the night weren't just at the hands of on-site magician Dick Steiner. Inviting Dwight Manley, owner of one of the famed Liberty Heads and a top sports agent for several athletic stars (including the NBA's Karl Malone), to the podium, Bowers revealed that the captive audience was about to witness a changing of the coin-guards, as Manley sold his nickel to Edward Lee for approximately $3 million dollars.

As the guests recovered from the initial delighted surprise of Manley's staggering payday, ANA Executive Director Chris Cipoletti took the floor to express his appreciation of the reception as it related to the ANA's World's Fair of Money. He thanked Steve Geppi, John Snyder, Laura Sperber and their staffs for all of their tremendous efforts.

Geppi returned to offer sincere thanks to Laura Sperber, who of course, started the ball rolling for this amazing event, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, and the ANA.

He also revealed yet another surprise treat: renowned businessman and

ANA Executive Director Chris Cipoletti addresses the crowd.

Chuck Parker, COO of Diamond Comic Distributors and Marvel's President of Publishing and Consumer Products and Chief Operating Officer Bill Jemas are all smiles at the event.

The lovely Geppi women, left to to right: Gina, Breanna, Danielle and Mindy Geppi.

Dave Anderson and his son, Adam (left) enjoy a camera moment with Gemstone's Tom Gordon and his lovely wife, Jenny.

collector Kerby Confer brought his rare "Inverted Flying Jenny" stamps, a block of four 1918 .24-cent airmail stamps, now appraised at $3.5 million.

Finally, Geppi extended an invitation for guests to form a line at the lavish gallery's library, where the coin-viewing would begin. There guests found, in the center of the lush burgundy carpeting, the display case holding millions of dollars in five-cent pieces. In addition to the four Liberty Heads, the case also held the coin-holder for the set, a $46,000 check which represented, at one time, the most ever paid for a coin, a couple of fake 1913 Liberty Head nickels and other materials. Notations of the coins' previous owners, including Egypt's King Farouk, highlighted the story of the coins in the case.

As if the thrill of seeing the rare nickels wasn't enough, attendees had the privilege of viewing–and even holding–two gold bars, one of which was recovered from the S.S. Central America in 1989. The ship sank following the California Gold Rush in 1857, and were loaned for the display by noted dealer John Albanese.

Also on display were a number of rare movie posters, including Mickey's Meller Drammer, Snow White, and others, as well as rare original concept art by Gustaf Tenggren.

And just when it seemed that the evening couldn't possibly improve upon itself, guests recieved commemorative goody bags as they exited the gala. The bags included plastic piggy bank safes with chocolate coins and Uncle Scrooge cards from Upper Deck, ANA World's Fair of Money brochures, certified copies of Gemstone's Free Comic Book Day offering, *Donald Duck Adventures*, courtesy of Comics Guaranty LLC, copies of The Numismatist magazine, lucite replicas of the 1913 liberty head nickel coins and much, much more.

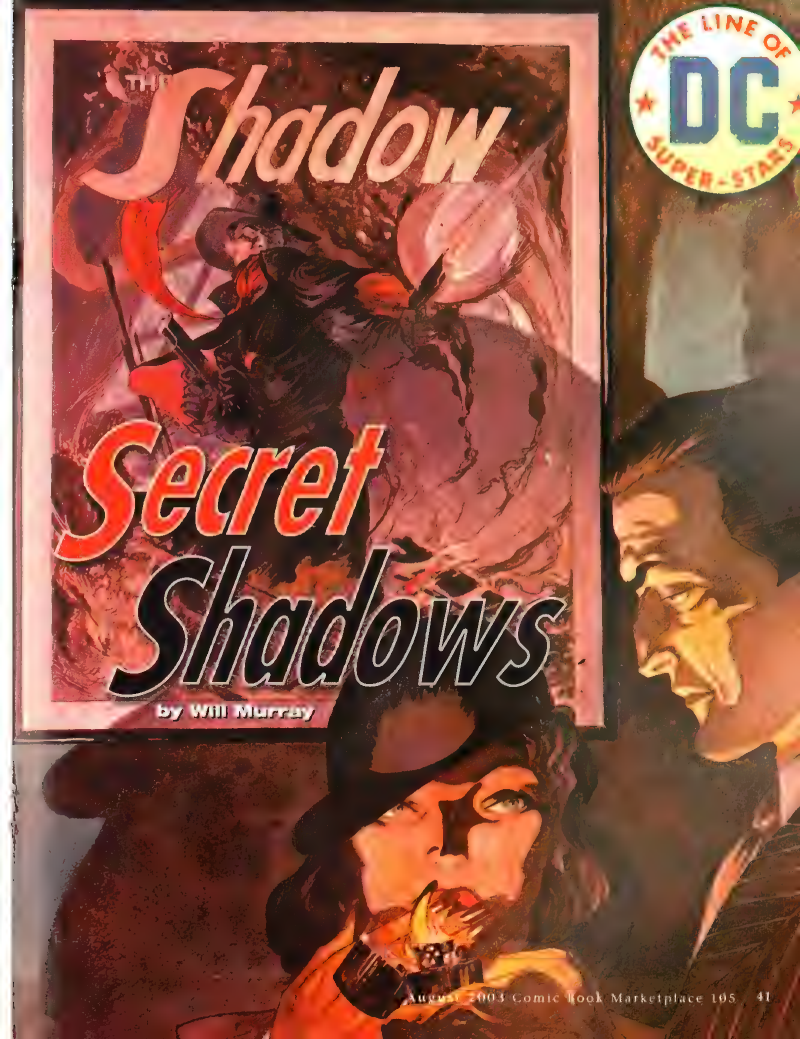
In the end, the event was heralded by one and all as a rousing success and a crowning achievement for the collecting industry. Robert Evans, a geologist and researcher from Zanesville, OH, called the reception "the numismatic event of the year. It was an outstanding, stunning [feat] to have all four coins here tonight."

Kerby Confer concurred, "This is the best and most well-attended collector event I've ever been to. The crème de la crème of the collecting world [are represented here]... and the food's great, too."

Reception visionary Laura Sperber was quite pleased with the outcome of her brainchild. "It was incredible. It exceeded my expectations and was a great moment in coin collecting history."

Brent D. Glass, Director of the National Museum of History, expressed, "Congratulations on the successful reunion of all four 1913 Liberty Head Nickels. The National Museum of American History is pleased to be a partner in this endeavor and we hope that many people will visit the coins and the ANA convention. I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and forging new friendships with so many people who have a deep love of history."

Steve Geppi and John Snyder also expressed their gratitude for the extreme support of Valeska Hilbig, Doug Mudd and the rest of the staff at the National Museum of History.

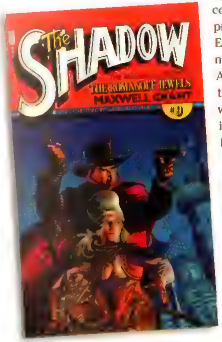

THE LINE OF
DC
SUPER-STARS
THE Shadow
Secret Shadows
by Will Murray

It's hard to believe, but this year marks 30 years since Michael William Kaluta burst upon the comics scene with the first issue of DC Comics' *The Shadow*. Hailed at the time as the most faithful four-color version of the Master of Darkness ever, the project had one of the most difficult births of any comic book.

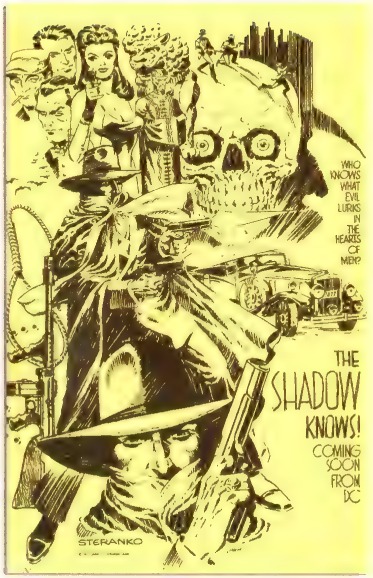
The appearance of *The Shadow* #1 came after a bidding war between DC and Marvel Comics. Both companies hotly sought the property, which was being reprinted by Pyramid Books with fabulous Steranko covers. Warner Bros. was considering a Shadow TV show. Having done so well with Robert E. Howard's pulp hero, Conan the Barbarian, Marvel must have thought he was a natural. It didn't cloud their thinking that new paperback avengers like The Executioner and The Destroyer were selling millions of copies.

Maybe DC just wanted to keep such a potentially lucrative property out of Marvel's hands. Who knows? Both companies had their artistic teams poised. DC planned to have Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, who had made a huge splash with *Swamp Thing*, do their Shadow. At Marvel, the duo who had turned *Tomb of Dracula* into a hit, Gerry Conway and Gene Colan, were waiting in the wings. DC ultimately won out through a fluke. Marvel was in negotiations with the guy who controlled the radio rights, but not the licensing rights. By the time Marvel discovered their error, DC had the Shadow. DC printed house ads showing the Wrightson Shadow. Then the problems began.

Berni Wrightson had fallen behind on *Swamp Thing*. He was out. Shadow editor Denny O'Neil took the Len Wein script to Steranko, who the story goes didn't care for Wein's script, or a substitute O'Neil whipped up himself, and wanted more artistic control than O'Neil was prepared to surrender. Exit Steranko. O'Neil next went to the superb Alex Toth, who took on the project but also wanted more control, including the right to farm out the scripts. O'Neil and Toth went their separate ways.



Paperback publishers Pyramid and Jove helped revive interest in The Shadow during the seventies with their series of books with cover illustrations by Jim Steranko.



Jim Steranko's unpublished ad for DC's Shadow comic. Because of differences over the script, Steranko pulled out of the project.

Another hot young artist, having cut his teeth on the pulpy "Carson of Venus" strip in Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Weird Worlds*, stepped in. Overhearing O'Neil complain that he had no artist for The Shadow, he volunteered. And so Michael William Kaluta became the man for the inky job.

All of which led up to "The Doom Puzzle!," a story so packed with plot that most pages were crammed with up to ten panels. Shadow fans old and new enjoyed the period setting, the hardboiled cast of characters and the combination of violent action and cool deduction.

I read it with a more critical eye. I had devoured tons of vintage Shadow novels and was actively seeking more. And I was a purist.

There was no question that Denny O'Neil was feeding off

Cover to *Shadow* #1 (Nov 1973), art: Michael Kaluta.

the classic Shadow of the 1930s and '40s. There was none of that "clouding men's minds" quasi-invisibility schtick which had been a staple of the radio show, which itself was loosely adapted from Walter B. Gibson's pulp novels, *very* loosely. The Shadow was a two-gun urban avenger and master hypnotist assisted by a small cadre of trusted agents. Chief of them was Harry Vincent. But the Harry Vincent of "The Doom Puzzle" was not the Harry Vincent I knew. Gibson's Vincent was a clean-cut straight-arrow type who was first among The Shadow's agents. O'Neil and Kaluta portrayed their Harry as a cynical Humphrey Bogart type who lived in an apartment building he also owned and had a new blonde every issue. Every true Shadow fan knew the authentic Harry hung out at Manhattan's Metrolite Hotel, on call to The Shadow, to whom he had pledged his life after the Master of Darkness had saved him from jumping off a bridge in *The Living Shadow*. The poor guy hardly ever dated. I couldn't

The Shadow makes his first appearance in the story "The Doom Puzzle" from *The Shadow* #1, art: Michael Kaluta.

INTRODUCING—
THE GREATEST CRIME-FIGHTER EVER...
Shadow
HE ACTS IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE, STRIKING SWIFTLY, STUNNINGLY, FATALLY!
WITH SPITTING AUTOMATICS AND A WEAPON THAT TERRIFIES THE WARRIOR-HE LEADS A BAND OF CIVILIAN AGENTS AGAINST THE CRIME'S WAREHOUSERS...
AND NOW, AS HE BATTLES THE CLOCK IN A DESPERATE RACE TO SOLVE...
THE DOOM PUZZLE!
FROM THE Shadow'S PRIVATE ANNALS, AS RECORDED BY DENNIS O'NEIL—WRITER / MICHAEL KALUTA—ARTIST

Splash page for *Shadow* #1, featuring all the series' main characters (Burbank, Vincent, Shrevvy, and Margo Lane), art: Michael Kaluta.

blame O'Neil. Gibson's Vincent was a stick figure. He would have been boring in comics.

Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, was a nondescript sort as the pulps portrayed him. He was the spider in the center of The Shadow's secret communications network, which in those days meant he operated in an isolated room, taking calls and commands, pulling plugs in and out of a switchboard like a Bell Telephone operator. Kaluta drew him young and blond instead of thick and balding, with a strange blue-steel device over one eye. It caught O'Neil's fancy, who asked Kaluta to keep it in succeeding issues. It added a touch of hi-tech mystery until you realized it was just a common jeweler's loupe.

For a long time, The Shadow employed a taxicab driver named Moe Shrevenitz as his wheels-on-call when operating in Manhattan. Radio picked up the character and renamed him Shrevvy, turning him into a kind of comic foil. Eventually, not so comic, he became Shrevvy in the pulps too. O'Neil seemed to lean toward the pulp Shrevvy, with maybe a dash of the radio incarnation.

Margo Lane was another creation of the airwaves. Gibson

continued on page 50

Sleep (1977)

A Verbal Sketch of the Artist:

J. DAVID SPURLOCK ON JEFFREY JONES

Interview by Bill Baker

For the past decade, Vanguard Press has played host to an astonishing array of talent, showcasing their sketches and collechons of their work in beautifully designed hard and soft cover books. Whether it's the graphic wizardry of Steranko, the lush line work of Curt Swan, or the inspired designs of Wally Wood, Carmine Infantino and Neal Adams, the place to go for a full helping of the riches that these folks produced behind the scenes is, in all likelihood, one of Vanguard's excellent sketch books.

As the driving force behind Vanguard, J. David Spurlock has gotten to know all of the folks above, and many more, as publisher, colleague and friend. So, when Jeffrey Jones was unable to spare the time to talk with us about his work, it was only natural that we turned to Spurlock for his insights into the life and work of Jeffrey Jones.

Bill Baker: How important is Jeffrey Jones' work, both within and outside of comics, in your opinion?

J. David Spurlock: Jeffrey is a fine artist who grew up loving comics and, despite being gifted with superior talent, to this day has never succumbed to any of the world's attempts to shun comics or illustration in favor of fine art. Other than his comics work for DC, Gold Key, King, Warren, *National Lampoon* and *Heavy Metal*, Jeffrey proved to be one of the top three heroic fantasy book cover painters of the '70s: the great renaissance in heroic fantasy books and art. The other two top fantasy cover illustrators of the '70s were Frazetta and Steranko.

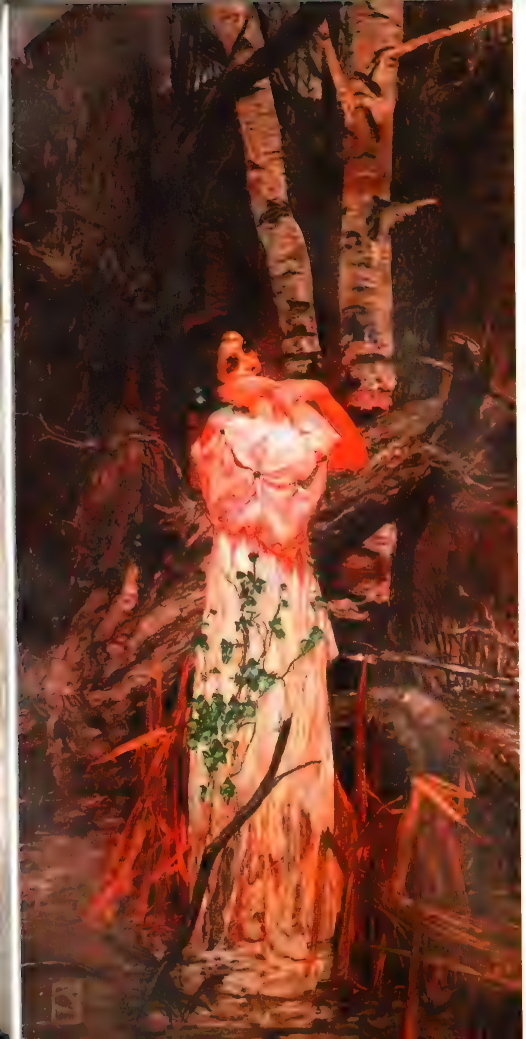
Baker: That's some pretty heady company you've placed him in. What are some of the aspects of Jeffrey's work that led to that conclusion?

Spurlock: Sheer proliferation is a major factor. Other than the many books collecting Jeffrey's works, you can really appreciate the scope, quality, and quantity of Jones' paintings via the Jeffrey Jones card sets published a few years back by Friedlander. Regarding the quality of Jeffrey's works, they succeed and rise to the top in every category: composition, anatomy, subject, palette, atmosphere, technique, style, taste.... Whether the subject is science fiction or barbarians, Jeffrey always adds elegance and statelinessto the work.

Baker: How much influence, if any, did the work of those other two masters, and Frazetta in particular, have upon Jeffrey's work, in your opinion?

Spurlock: Jones' generation was the first to grow up appreciating the comics work of Al Williamson, Wally Wood, Roy Krenkel and Frank Frazetta in 1950s sci-fi comics like *Weird Science* and *Famous Funnies*. Steranko was a little younger than the '50s artists, coming in and revolutionizing comics in the '60s before moving on to illustration. Frazetta, Krenkel and Everett Raymond Kinstler were artists who went from comic books in the '50s to broader careers by the '60s. Jones obviously favored Frazetta the most, and with good reason. Though sword and sorcery literature had its beginnings in prehistoric myth, evolved through time with help by many, including J. R. R. Tolkien, it was Robert E. Howard who did the most to refine it into a recognizable genre with Conan and other savage tales. But it was Frank Frazetta who really invented sword and sorcery visually. Howard's stories had been around for decades with little fanfare until, in the '60s, Frazetta recognized them as the perfect vehicle via which he could unleash his surging, raw, primal, machismo talent upon the world. The wake of Frazetta's success on Conan made the comics possible, made the movies possible, and helped open publishing to a new era of sci-fi, fantasy, and sword and sorcery books which gave Jones, Steranko, and later Ken Kelly, the Brothers Hildebrandt and Boris Vallejo a field in which to prove themselves.

Jones had a natural flair for drawing but, when it came to painting, learned atmosphere, drama and color from



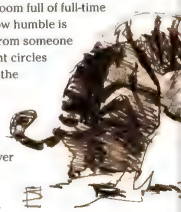
Frazetta's example. Jones went on, like so many of us, to study the works of earlier artists who had influenced Frazetta, including Hal Foster, Zdenek Burian, and the Brandywine school of illustration. As Jones continued to develop past early influences, including Rembrandt, Klimt, LePage and Alma Tadema, the tendency towards romance and elegance in the work became obvious.

Regarding Steranko: One might view his entire fantasy-illustration career as a response to Dan Adkins' challenge to prove top-quality sword and sorcery art could be done without Frazetta as an influence! Jeffrey was very conscious of Steranko's work but, unlike Frazetta, I'm unaware of any recognizable influence Steranko had on Jones' art.

Baker: How did you first make Jeffrey's acquaintance?

Spurlock: By the early '80s, I was making a living as a commercial illustrator in Texas. Around 1990, I was elected President of the Dallas Society of Illustrators. The first people I tried to bring in to speak and show their work were Jeffrey Jones and San Francisco album, poster and comix artist Rick Griffin (as well as C.F. Payne and Jack Unruh). Before I heard back from Griffin, whom I'd met at the Fillmore auditorium in San Francisco, he died in a motorcycle accident. By this time Jeffrey was doing more fine art than illustration. Jones thanked me for the invitation but had mixed feelings about speaking to a room full of full-time illustrators. How humble is that...coming from someone who could paint circles around 80% of the illustrators in Dallas!

I got to know Jeffrey a bit, casually, over



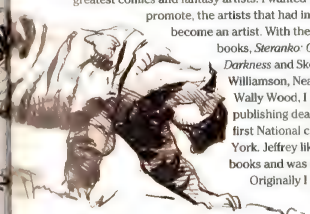
LEFT: Blind Narcissus (1977)

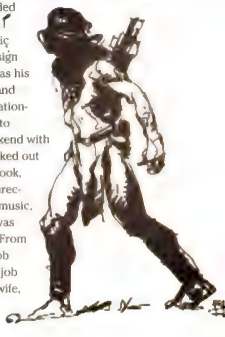
The First Wave (1975)

some years, bumping into each other at conventions in Atlanta, San Diego, New York... But we really got to be good friends during and since our work together on the *Jeffrey Jones Sketchbook*.

Baker: How did you become his publisher?

Spurlock: I gradually started doing more publishing than illustration and set out to publish books on the world's greatest comics and fantasy artists. I wanted to work with, and promote, the artists that had inspired me to become an artist. With the successes of my books, *Steranko: Graphic Prince of Darkness* and Sketchbooks on Al Williamson, Neal Adams and Wally Wood, I pitched a publishing deal to Jeffrey at the first National convention in New York. Jeffrey liked the Vanguard books and was very enthusiastic. Originally I was going to handle everything—design, editing, art direction—but both Jeffrey's and Carmine Infantino's books were due to premier at the 2000 San Diego Comic-Con and I needed help to make the deadlines. I asked award-winning graphic novelist George Pratt to design and co-edit the Jones book as his work is so tasteful, and he and Jeffrey had a great, long relationship. George and I went up to Woodstock to spend a weekend with Jeffrey. The three of us worked out everything to do with the book, picked the art, discussed direction, art, tone, technology, music, design—and socialized. It was really a fabulous weekend. From there it was a production job with George doing a stellar job aided by his very talented wife, Meredith.





The Wall (1977)

Baker: What kind of projects might Vanguard and Jones have planned for the future, and when can we expect to see these hit the shelves?

Spurlock: Everyone loves the *Jeffrey Jones Sketchbook*, including Al Williamson, Jeffrey and myself. Frazetta was especially fond of the cover painting. More recently Jeffrey and I have come up with other books we want to do together including *The Sequential Art of Jeffrey Jones*, which would collect most and document all Jones comics stories, and *Jeffrey Jones: On Drawing Women*. We decided to delay these as a favor to Underwood Books who recently released their beautiful *Art of Jeffrey Jones* coffee-table book, but hope to get ours back onto the production schedule soon. Info on all Vanguard books is available via the Internet at creativemix.com/vanguard. I believe Donald Grant has a new collection of Jeffrey's *Idyl* planned.

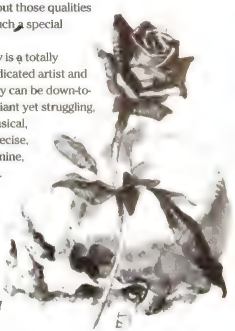
VANGUARD'S JEFFREY JONES SKETCHBOOK

Baker: Are there any particular moments that stand out in your memory which highlight those qualities that make Jeffrey such a special artist?

Spurlock: I'll never forget the excitement and electricity in the air when, in the early 1970s, Jeffrey and his Studio cohorts (Wrightson, Windsor-Smith and Kaluta) started introducing the comics world to limited edition prints and portfolios. We thought those guys were the Beatles of fantasy art!

Baker: What about those qualities that make Jeffrey such a special friend?

Spurlock: Jeffrey is a totally unique, sincere, dedicated artist and human being. Jeffrey can be down-to-earth yet aloof, brilliant yet struggling, profound and whimsical, spontaneous yet precise, masculine and feminine, all at the same time. I'm proud to know such a gifted artist and gentle soul as a friend.



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Fantasy's Animated Creator

Interview by Dan Johnson

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the first generation of comic book artists and writers who grew up reading comic books themselves began to come into their own within the industry. One of the break-out artists of this generation of fans-turned-professionals was New York native, Frank Brunner. Brunner rose from the ranks of fandom and started his career working for Castle of Frankenstein *and the various horror magazines of the Warren line.*

It would be Brunner's work at Marvel comics though, first as one of the defining artists for Dr. Strange and then as one of the fathers of Howard the Duck, which would win the young artist acclaim and a legion of fans. But after his time at Marvel, and at various independent companies in the early 1980s, Brunner left the comics field to seek other endeavors. In the mid-1980s, Brunner made a move to Hollywood and a move away from comics. Throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s, Brunner's talent was devoted to such animated television series as Jonny Quest, Dark Waters *and* X-Men *(to name just a few). He also worked on such film fare as* Cellar Dweller, *the television film version of* Dr. Strange *and the animated feature film,* Once Upon a Forest.

These days, Brunner has started making a return to comics doing covers and commissioned art pieces. Recently Comic Book Marketplace *had the pleasure of catching up with one of comics most animated fantasy artists to find out what the future holds for him and for his fans who are grateful to have him back in the game.*

CBM: First, tell the readers of *Comic Book Marketplace* a little about yourself. What first sparked your interest in fantasy art?

Brunner: I'd always, even as a child, loved to doodle. But if I have to cite specific "sparks," first, at about age five, I was down with the mumps or something and somebody gave me a drawing toy where you use a magnet to manipulate bits of metal shavings over a basic face, [and you would give the face] hair or a beard or a really crazy mustache. I'd play with that for hours! Then my Dad bought a TV and I became a *Winky-Dink* nut. That's where you [could] send away for a clear plastic sheet to put over the TV screen, and they would show a cartoon, and suddenly it would freeze frame. Lets say "our hero" was trapped in front of a river, a voice would suggest "a bridge is what's needed" and you would take your magic crayon and draw it in (where the blank part of the picture was), then after a few minutes the hero would cross over the bridge you drew.

When I was about eight, one day my school suddenly called everyone to the auditorium and told us we were going to see an animated movie! It was *Fantasia*! I was awestruck, [and] I think that was the moment I decided what I wanted to do with my life! Since there was no animation being done in Brooklyn at the time, I turned to comics for further inspiration. [This was] a profession which I soon found out was almost exclusively existing across the East River in Manhattan!

Finally I'd just like to add two words that also were very important in my early development....King Kong!

CBM: Your first work appeared in such magazines as *Castle of*

Frankenstein, *Vampirella*, *Creepy* and *Eerie*. Were you a fan of horror yourself before working on these magazines? If so, what were your influences from the world of horror (either in comics, film, or literature)?

Brunner: Early on it was the Karloff *Frankenstein*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Mummy*. Later, when I was about thirteen or fourteen, I discovered EC Comics, like *Tales from the Crypt* and all the other horror comics, and of course *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. And just about the time I was sixteen, Warren launched *Creepy* magazine, with new Frazetta art! My first published work appeared on the fan club page a few issues later.

CBM: Speaking of Frank Frazetta, how would you say his explosion on the scene in the early 1960s influenced you to become an artist?

Brunner: I first saw Frazetta's work on the cover of [the final issue of] *Weird Science Fantasy* (the one with the space guy battling a bunch of cave guys). Until that time, I thought the best artist who ever did comic books was Mac Raboy or perhaps Joe Kubert, Gil Kane or Carmine Infantino! All that changed when I saw that cover and began to scoop up anything done by Frazetta. I had hoped to draw very much like him and often copied some of his posing for its gutsy, raw emotion and lighting, but in the process developed my own style and mixed a few others in too. His work was the final epiphany that sealed my fate to become a fantasy artist!

CBM: After your time at Marvel working on such books as *Dr. Strange*, *Howard the Duck* and *Man-Thing*, you basically left mainstream comics. Is there any chance that you might ever be lured back to working for Marvel or perhaps one of the other big companies like DC or Dark Horse on a regular basis?

Brunner: Those companies you mention have no interest in my work or

VANGUARD'S EYES OF... GHT FANTASY DRAWINGS OF FRANK BRUNNER

KING-LORD & EVES ... ART FANTASY DRAWINGS OF FRANK BRUNNER

my concepts. Besides, if I were to return to comics, I'd need to write my own stories, create my own characters. [I would] perhaps just do tight layouts and find a suitable finisher, someone whose style is sympathetic to my own. But most importantly I'd want to own my creations! So perhaps this could happen with a newer upstart company—perhaps, I say.

CBM: You left comics and worked in the animation field. Are there any projects in that field that you are currently working on?

Brunner: Yes, I worked in animation for fourteen years (1984-1998) and I have a pet project entitled *Dinoforce and the World of Novasauria* which I've been working on a bit at a time for several years. For more info on this, and a gallery of recent paintings and drawings, please check out my new website at www.frankbrunner.net.

CBM: In regards to your work in comics today, you are currently doing the covers for the *Wild Stars* comic. How did you come to be involved with that book?

Brunner: The publisher and author, Michael Tierney, contacted me, gave me an outline of his stories and asked if I'd be interested in drawing it. I liked his concept, but it was his property [and] I was very busy doing commission work, so he asked if I'd do the covers, and I agreed. But I should point out that I did write and draw a short fantasy story for a comic anthology called *The Forbidden Book* #2, published by Renaissance Press just last year, a series of covers for another new independent company called Silver Comics and a trade paperback cover for a new book called *Wearing the Horns*. This one is endorsed by Harlan Ellison.

CBM: Last year you had *Eyes of Light: Fantasy Drawings of Frank Brunner* published. For the readers out there who may not have had the chance to see this book, what can they expect from it when they purchase it?

Brunner: Just a book chock-full of new, never before published work and special selections of older art. This isn't just a sketch book, it contains 112 pages of mostly finished fully realized fantasy art! There's also a section devoted to my years in animation and commentary throughout. This book is published by Vanguard Press and is the best book yet about my work. The paperback edition is in its second printing, and can be ordered directly from me (autographed) or Vanguard Press or Bud Plant!

Howard The Duck and Spider-Man ™ © Marvel Characters, Inc.

CBM: Finally, what can your fans expect from you in the near future? What projects are you current working on at this time? Also, how can your fans go about contacting you if they wish to commission a piece from you?

Brunner: A lot of commission work is mostly what I am doing and talking with a couple of publishers about doing some comics again. [I] can't say who they are till a deal is sealed. Anyone who wishes to commission me should look at my previously mentioned website. My prices start around $150 and go on from there. My email address for direct contact is there also, just click on the "comments" icon, or write to me at 312 Kildare Court, Myrtle Beach, SC 29588.

AN HOUR LATER, IN A SWANK, MID-MANHATTAN SIDE STREET, THE BEAUTIFUL MARGO LANE STEPS FROM THE CAB, ACCOMPANIED BY A SUAVE GENTLEMAN KNOWN AS LAMONT CRANSTON!

Kaluta's distinctive inerpretation of Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane.

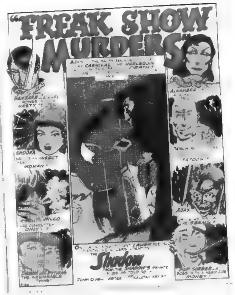
Secret Shadows

continued from page 43

had been happily writing Shadow novels for about ten years without her. Even when she was introduced into the radio program in 1937, he resisted using her. She was a society friend of Lamont Cranston's, portrayed in radio as a kind of unmarried Nora to Cranston's Nick Charles.

In 1941, Gibson finally succumbed and Margo drifted into the pulps, eventually becoming a cross between that pesky Lois Lane (who might have been her sister) and an official agent.

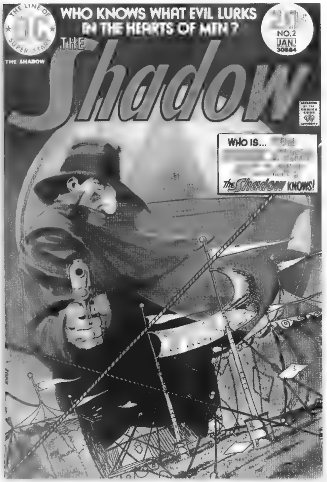
O'Neil's Margo was essentially Gibson's, a functioning operative, not someone ripe for being carried off by the weekly mad scientist or arch-vivisectionist. The chumminess of the Cranston/Margo radio relationship was nowhere to be seen. Margo was all business, in the first issue blowing a thug away in a fashion Walter Gibson never would have tolerated.



Splash page for *Shadow* #2, this story was the only straight adaptation of a Walter Gibson story that Denny O'Neil attempted, art: Michael Kaluta.

Which brings me to Lamont Cranston. O'Neil portrayed him just about right. Of course, in the pulp, the millionaire sportsman wasn't really the true identity of The Shadow. But millions of radio listeners never suspected that and Gibson was forced by popular demand to all but banish aviator Kent Allard—The Shadow's actual true identity—from his own adventures. The radio show was that popular.

As for The Shadow, it was difficult to judge him based on that first issue. He was a hat, a cloak, a striking laugh and a relentless marksman. He seemed to be wearing the requisite black cloak over black clothes. The scarlet cloak collar sometimes looked suspiciously like a scarf, but that was a



Cover to *The Shadow* #2 (Jan 1974), art: Michael Kaluta.

The Harlequin proved to be one of The Shadow's better foes during DC's run.

In *The Shadow* #3 (Mar 1974), "Kingdom of The Cobra" the addition of Bernie Wrightson's inks to Kaluta's pencils made this issue the most artistically satisfying of the DC series, as the page above well demonstrates.

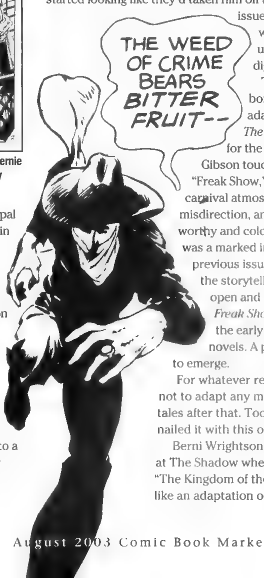
minor deviation from the classic image. His hypnotic fire opal ring was in evidence, if sometimes mis-colored. He moved in and out of the shadows in classic form, never once turning literally invisible like the Lamont Cranston portrayed on radio by Orson Welles, Bret Morrison and others. Over the course of these early issues, I noticed some telltale signs of what O'Neil and Kaluta were using as inspiration. The Shadow's red-lined cloak morphed into a kind of quasi-trench coat or

Cover to *The Shadow* #3 (Mar 1974), art: Michael Kaluta.

YOU HAVE EXACTLY ONE MINUTE... SIXTY SECONDS BEFORE A THOUSAND VOLTS BURN UP YOUR GUTS!
WILL YOU PRAY? PLEASE! WHILE ARE YOU GET WORDS?
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA
I'LL SAY ONE THING FOR YOU, YOU'VE GOT BOTTLES... BOTH KINDS OF 'EM!
I'LL TEACH YOU MANNERS!

The Shadow strapped down and about to be electrocuted in "Kingdom of The Cobra" from *The Shadow* #3 (Mar 1974). Pencils: Michael Kaluta and inks: Bernie Wrightson.

duster, and that flapping red thing became a scarf. Soon, he started looking like they'd taken him off the covers of later issues of *The Shadow* when it was an undistinguished digest.



This suspicion was borne out when O'Neil adapted the 1944 novel *The Freak Show Murders* for the second issue. All the Gibson touches were in O'Neil's "Freak Show," the bizarre cast, the carnival atmosphere, the artful misdirection, and in the Harlequin, a worthy and colorful foe. Kaluta's art was a marked improvement over the previous issue's rushed look. Even the storytelling appeared more open and better paced. *The Freak Show Murders* was one of the early digest-era Shadow novels. A pattern was beginning to emerge.

For whatever reason, O'Neil chose not to adapt any more vintage Shadow tales after that. Too bad. He really nailed it with this one.

Berni Wrightson finally had his crack at The Shadow when he inked issue #3, "The Kingdom of the Cobra." It sounded like an adaptation of the 1934 Shadow

When Michael Kaluta fell behind on his *Shadow* deadline, *Johnny Hazzard* artist Frank Robbins was brought in to take up the slack.

novel, *The Cobra*, where the Master of Darkness battled a rival crime fighter calling himself the Cobra. But it wasn't. Here, a disguised Shadow infiltrates a prison run by greasy gangster King Cobra and narrowly escapes frying in the electric chair. Violent and suspenseful, it showed everyone in rare form, with The Shadow trading his pistols for a massive Thompson submachine gun.

Cover to *The Shadow* #4 (May 1974), art: Michael Kaluta.

O'Neil dusted off Len Wein's orphan script for issue #4, "Death is Bliss," rewriting it into something more in line with his own vision. In the reworking, the story became a throwback to that cramped first issue, and the climactic battle between The Shadow and the villain for control of a seaplane suggested O'Neil was already repeating himself. Many of his Shadow scripts climax in the air, usually involving The Shadow's trusty autogyro. Kaluta fell behind, so *Johnny Hazzard* artist Frank Robbins took up the slack for issue #5, "Night of Neptune's Death." It proved to be a fateful issue.

Cover to *The Shadow* #5 (July 1974), art: Frank Robbins.

Early sales figures had come in. While fans loved Kaluta's semi-Underground work, traditional comics readers did not. And in those pre-Direct Market days, that was the kiss of death. DC planned to kill the book with issue #8. Kaluta exited the series with #6, "Night of the Ninja," which was probably the first great Ninja story in comic book history. This was before the Great Ninja Scare, where everyone from Daredevil to the X-Men experienced the obligatory Ninja infestation. It's hard to choose between this and "The Kingdom of the Cobra" as O'Neil and Kaluta's finest hour. I'd have to give the nod to "Cobra" because Wrightson made Kaluta shine in a way Kaluta himself couldn't duplicate.

Cover to *The Shadow* #6 (Sept 1974), art: Michael Kaluta.

Another fine example of the Kaluta/Wrightson team from *The Shadow* #3 (Mar 1974).

In this story, The Shadow admits to having been trained by a Ninja. You won't find the word Ninja in any of the 325 original Shadow novels, but O'Neil wasn't far off.

The first great Ninja story in comics "Night of the Ninja" from *The Shadow* #6 (Sept 1974), art: Michael Kaluta.

Cover to *The Shadow* #7 (Nov 1974), art: Frank Robbins.

Walter Gibson once told me that Ninja legends and stealth techniques partially inspired his Shadow.

By this time, sales figures on Frank Robbins' first Shadow came in. They were great. *The Shadow* was hastily un-cancelled. Fortunately, the super-fast Robbins had several issues already completed, because with the book's pending cancellation, he had moved over to Marvel and *The Invaders*. These tales were more actiony and less moody. There seemed less for the die-hard Shadow fan to sink their teeth into. Some people thought Robbins missed the essence of The Shadow. Not so. Walter Gibson wrote moody atmospheric novels that invariably shifted into high velocity once the Master of Darkness whipped out his matched .45 automatics. Robbins captured the battling two-gun Shadow very well indeed. The noir atmosphere might have been sacrificed on the altar of better sales. My favorite story during this phase was "The Night of the Beast" in #7, where The Shadow gets caught in a violent love triangle between Broadway actress Morag Mayne, gangster Joey Lyce and a pathetic lovesick hunchback named Pile. It's a poignant bittersweet tale for all its violence. One hint: nobody gets the girl.

The amazing thing about Robbins' work on The Shadow was that he was still writing and drawing the *Johnny Hazzard* newspaper strip. It was said Robbins drew the dailies and Sunday page over a typical three-day weekend, leaving the remainder of the week for churning out his comic book work.

It was in this period that I made what was for me a startling discovery. In issue #8's "The Night of the Mummy," bowing to reader demand to delve into the mysteries behind The Shadow, O'Neil revealed that Lamont Cranston was a real guy whom The Shadow impersonated, and sometimes used for his own purposes. Contrasting this revelation, he introduced Kent Allard, the Master of Darkness's true self.

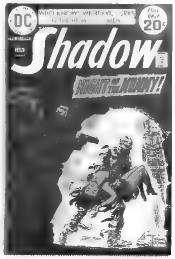
But this was not the Kent Allard Walter Gibson had portrayed. That Allard was a World War I spy turned aviator and explorer. This Allard was a bush pilot. More suspiciously, he sports an uncharacteristic mustache. It was the mustache that gave it all away. Back in the 1960s, Belmont Books, a division of Archie Comics, had hired mystery writer Dennis Lynds to write new modernized Shadow adventures as Maxwell Grant. As it happened, the first Shadow novel I ever read was Lynds' *The Shadow's Revenge*, in which the Lynds' Allard was introduced as an alter ego of The Shadow. In this book, he was a mustachioed big game hunter.

Lynds also placed The Shadow's mysterious sanctum at the top of a modern office

OH... MY MYSTERIOUS BENEFACTOR! YOU STARTLED ME! COME--SIT NEXT TO ME AND WE'LL CHAT!
I PREFER TO STAND! I HAVE A QUESTION--WHY DID PILE TRY TO ABDUCT YOU?
I ASSUMED THAT RAT FACE GENT--YOU'LL BUT PERHAPS NOT... WHEN I WAS BATHING JOEY PILE WAS ALWAYS MOONING AROUND!
BUT HE'S A SMALL SUBJECT! I'D RATHER DISCUSS US! I HAVEN'T YET THANKED YOU--NOT PROPERLY!
TO TELL THE TRUTH, I THINK HE'S SWEET ON ME! THE POOR GEEZE!... HE WAITS ON SHOW GIRLS!
YOUR LIPS COLD AS ICE! WHAT KIND O' MAN ARE YO...?
WITHOUT WARNING, A HULKING MASS SMASHES THROUGH THE WINDOW BEHIND THE SHADOW AND...

The Shadow caught in a love triangle in "The Night of the Beast" from *The Shadow* #7 (Oct 1974), art: Frank Robbins.

Lynds also placed The Shadow's mysterious sanctum at the top of a modern office



Cover to *The Shadow* #8 (Jan 1975), art: Frank Robbins.

building, in contrast to Gibson's cob-webbed hidey-hole somewhere in the bowels of Times Square. That's where O'Neil placed it too. In the comic, his agents, including Burbank, hung around there between assignments. This was another deviation from canon. Only The Shadow had access to his Sanctum. Any crook who ever trespassed was invariably hunted down and executed. Now I understood why DC's Shadow cried "The Weed of Crime Bears Bitter Fruit," which was a staple of the radio show, but never the pulp. Lynds had used it too. Lynds' Shadow was an updated amalgam of the pulp incarnation and the radio phenomenon. The secret of the DC Shadow was revealed. They did their research on the cheap—recent non-canonical paperbacks and the most inexpensive original Gibson novels obtainable, inexpensive post-war digest *Shadows*.

Frank Robbins' splash page to *The Shadow* #8 (Jan 1975).

WHO'S THERE?!
COME ON MARGO! LET'S GET MOVING!
NY-R12
LAMONT, I DON'T UNDERSTAND! YOU CAN'T HAVE BEATEN HIM IN A FAIR FIGHT!
THE SHADOW? NO, MISS LANE! I'VE TOLD YOU I AM JUST ONE OF HIS AGENTS!
OCCASIONALLY HE BORROWS MY CAB! THAT'S ALL!
NO MAN ALIVE KNOWS WHO HE REALLY IS! I SUPPOSE NOBODY EVER WILL!

Who really is The Shadow? According to *The Shadow* #8 (Jan 1975) it's not Lamont Cranston, but pilot Kent Allard, art: Frank Robbins.

Well, they did a pretty good job for all that. It's too bad that replacement artist E. R. Cruz couldn't un-sink the *S.S. Shadow*. He came in with #10, "Night of the Avenger," in which The Shadow teamed up with that other Street & Smith hero, The Avenger, to defeat the sinister Shiwan Khan, a super-villain plucked from the original *Shadow* magazine. Future Batman film producer Mike Uslan scripted this and the previous issue, "Night of the Falling Death," which used a vintage Shadow radio program opening as its jumping-off point. The low point for The Shadow had to be #9, wherein the bad guy (woman, actually) blasts both .45s out of his black-gloved hands, disarming him in one easy panel. Such a thing would never happen to the authentic Shadow. It turned out to be an omen of impending doom.

DC's *Shadow* vanished beneath the dark seas with issue #12. Denny O'Neil returned to script the final three issues. As for Mike Kaluta, he never really left. He kept turning out his moody evocative covers to the bitter, weedy end, although he had abandoned his trademark watercolor technique with issue #4. That seemed to be the end of an interesting experiment. But not quite.

Cover to *The Shadow* #10 (May 1975), art: Michael Kaluta.

In 1979, Fantagraphics announced a Shadow graphic novel scripted by Harlan Ellison, with Mike Kaluta returning to draw. The cover to *Dragonshadows* was widely disseminated. It looked great. Alas, the project never materialized. Without a script, Kaluta had nothing to draw.

There was a strange sequel to the O'Neil-Kaluta Shadow. In 1987, with DC having revived the most bizarre version of The Shadow ever, Marvel acquired graphic novel rights to the character. It was as strange a twist as you could expect. O'Neil and Kaluta re-teamed for the project. Berni Wrightson was all set to ink, but was replaced at the last moment by Russ Heath. "Hitler's Astrologer" was released in hardcover with much fanfare and surprisingly little attention otherwise. Maybe its time had passed. But it was the ultimate expression of this particular Shadow artistic team. When I got my copy, I couldn't help but notice that the story didn't so much end as peter out. I asked Denny O'Neil about this, and he revealed that the printer had left off the final pages by accident. If anyone noticed, they didn't complain. Thus ended the Denny O'Neil/Mike Kaluta Shadow, not with a mocking laugh, but an embarrassed chuckle.

Wrightson: I don't know that I have a favorite. I get asked that a lot and I hate to nail it down. They're like my children and I don't want to show favoritism. I really like all of them in different ways for different reasons.

CBM: Do you still have any kind of relationship with Frazetta?

Wrightson: I haven't really spoken to Frank in 30 years. We were never really close friends. I've always admired him from afar. I think he's just so huge in my life that I still feel a little intimidated.

CBM: How about Jeff Jones?

Wrightson: We kind of fell out of touch a few years ago. I haven't talked to Jeff in maybe ten years.

CBM: Mike Kaluta:

Wrightson: We keep trying to get together. We correspond through emails and phone calls, and whenever he's in California or I'm in New York we keep trying to get together, but we keep missing. He's one of my oldest, dearest friends and I wish we had more time to spend together.

I CANNOT REMEMBER THE MORNING WHEN I FIRST FOUND MYSELF HERE... WELL, I BELONG TO IT NOW—AND IT CARES FOR ME IN RETURN—SHELTERING ME AT—NURTURING ME, HOLDING ME CLOSE WITHIN ITS VELVET EMBRACE.
THE MOON IS RISING NOW, CLIMBING ITS WAY UP THE SKY—AND AS IT RISES, ITS LIGHT CASTS ITS CHILLING GRACE ON THE MURKY OOZE BELOW—THE SWAMP THAT IS MY HOME...
I MOVE SLOWLY THROUGH THE MOSS-DRAPED MIRE—TREADING A PATH THAT IS WORN SMOOTH FROM MY CONSTANT PASSING—OR BEHIND THE SHADOWS AND THE DARK TREES TWISTING THORNS TO MY INEVITABLE DESTINATION
THE EDGE OF THE SWAMP—AND THE MUSHY WET-OLD MARSH THAT RISES LIKE AN AGING APPARITION INTO A COLD EXPANSE OF SATURATED AIR... SPECTACULARLY FULL OF BRIGHT LIGHTS AND PROMISES—AND MEMORIES THAT BRING ONLY PAIN...
STORY: LEN WEIN
ART: BERNI WRIGHTSON
SWAMP THING

From the original art, the splash page to *House of Secrets* #92 (July 1971), the first appearance of Swamp Thing, art: Bernie Wrightson.

CBM: And Len Wein?

Wrightson: I see Len occasionally. He lives out here in the neighborhood. And Marv Wolfman.

CBM: With your love of EC comics, how did you like working with Joe Orlando at DC Comics?

Wrightson: Joe was just an absolute joy to work with. He was the best editor. He was more than an editor, he was a collaborator. I really miss Joe and I really miss those old days.

CBM: When you're doing your comic book work, how much photo reference do you normally use?

Wrightson: Very little to none at all. Using reference has always been a real pain in the ass to me. First you have to collect all the stuff; then you have to organize it and file it; then, when you're working, you have to go find it. There are guys who can do that. I just never got in the habit of using it. It was always easier and faster for me to just make it up, unless I had something really

The stunning climax from Bernie's adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's "Cool Air," from *Eerie* #62 (Jan. 1975), art: Bernie Wrightson.

specific. Cars—I hate drawing cars. I'll find ways around drawing cars; maybe I'll just put a piece of the car. When you're drawing cars, you need the reference.

When I started drawing, nobody else in my family [drew], and, except for a friend or two, there was nobody around telling me I couldn't do it this way. I just assumed that everything I saw, all the paintings and drawings I saw, were just made up. The idea of producing a reference just never occurred to me. I just thought, okay, just learn how to draw all this stuff. And that's what I did. Until now, just the way I do it. To this day I hate producing reference.

CBM: Any thoughts on Alan Moore's depiction of Swamp Thing?

Wrightson: I love it! He took a character that had really reached a dead end. And literally reinvented it. And just brought so much more to the character and the story. So much more than would have ever occurred to me. When I was doing it he was a monster hero and that was pretty much it. So you have a monster hero so you pit him against other monsters. You pit him against monster villains. And after a couple of years of that I just got tired of it. This really isn't going anywhere. This is basically the same story every month or every two months. So I gave it up and didn't really look at it for a long time. Went on to working for Warren. And then a few years later Alan Moore and John Totteldon picked it up and I thought it was just wonderful. It was great it isn't even the same character anymore.

CBM: It's nice that both versions are remembered. Neither one has eclipsed the other.

Wrightson: That's what kind of amazes me. I saw the Alan Moore stuff and I immediately thought, boy, we're just a bunch of old fogies, now this came along and it's going to completely eclipse what we did and nobody is going to remember that. So, yeah, it really kind of amazes me that people are still so fond of it.

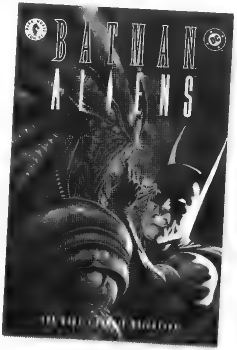
CBM: Your latest comic book work has been the covers for the *Batman: Nevermore* miniseries. Do you have any other upcoming DC work?

Wrightson: Not at the moment. I kind of got out of comics. I've been doing it for so many years—just kind of got burned out. I went looking for other things to do. I've done some film work, conceptual stuff. That started with *Ghostbusters*, I worked on both *Ghostbusters* movies and then occasional movie stuff. Whenever something comes along.

CBM: If you could be offered a dream project, something that you really like to do, something that you could pour your heart and soul into, what would that be?

Wrightson: At this point I don't know. There is nothing that really springs to mind. At my age I really have to think about getting married to a project for several years. Just pouring that much time and that much energy into one thing is one of the things that got me out of comics. The last couple of comics things I did just took so long. The *Batman/Aliens* thing that was kind of a

After laboring two years on the two issue *Batman/Aliens* project, Bernie decided he'd had enough of comic book work…for now.



turning point, because that was just two books and it took me like two years. And it didn't pay all that well. I managed, I survived but mostly it was the time. I'm too slow to be doing this anymore. Two issues of a comic book shouldn't take two years. I just realized that I just didn't love it that much anymore.

CBM: Well, it is a beautiful set of issues. So there is nothing in comic books that you're dying to do, you're done with that?

Wrightson: Well I learned a long time ago to never say never again. That always comes back to bite me in the ass. So I'm not going to say I'll never do comics again, because you know I might change my mind next week. Something might come along or maybe I'll get an idea that is just so brilliant and wonderful that I've got to do it. Right now at 11am on August the 7th, 2003, I don't want to. But talk to me next week and the whole thing might change.

CBM: Now, still on comics, the horror anthology seems to be dead in comic books—would that be something that you would be interested in doing again, if someone approached you about it?

Wrightson: I don't know. I see horror anthologies like independent things. I don't really much care for the direction that it seems to be going.

CBM: I guess I just miss the old days of *House of Mystery*. I miss all of that stuff.

Wrightson: You can still go back and read the ECs.

CBM: Are there any current comic book or comic book artists that you enjoy reading? Or that you follow?

Wrightson: I'm so far out of the loop right now that I really can't think of anybody. I occasionally see something that really impresses me, but for the life of me right now nothing comes to mind. I think the last thing that I read that I really enjoyed was *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. I liked that so much that I refused to even see the movie.

CBM: I think that's pretty much the feeling all around for anyone who has read the comics or the graphic novel.

Wrightson: I just thought, why do I want to see it. I've seen the trailers for the movie, and I thought if I see the movie it's going to taint my memory of the graphic novel.

CBM: Tell me about the film work that you are doing and overall what you're working on now.

Wrightson: Just last week I did some conceptual stuff for *Blade 3*. I was working with K&B Effects Company who is putting in a bid for *Blade 3*, and I did some concept drawings for them. There is not a lot of movie work around right now. Not that I know of, or not much of anything that I'm really interested in. Since I've been out here living in the LA area for five years, I designed the monster for *The Faculty* and I worked on *Galaxy Quest*, did some work on *Spiderman*, and a bunch of movies that never got made. That's the nature of the business.

CBM: I was just about to say that. You do stuff and it doesn't come out. Am I mistaken, or does your website mention that the book of your art is going to be put out again? Or are you doing another version?

Wrightson: We're talking about it. You remember *A Look Back*…

CBM: Yes, I have it.

Wrightson: We're talking about picking up where that left off, and doing something up until the present.

CBM: Would it include everything that is in *A Look Back* and proceed to the present, or is it going to be a whole new volume of stuff?

Wrightson: It will be a whole new volume. I haven't really sat down and thought about it yet. I think maybe a quick summarization of *A Look Back* and then move forward. We'll see. I don't know when it will come out.

CBM: Well I want to thank you for all the years of horror and beauty, laughter and entertainment. I really appreciate you giving me the time to speak to you.

Wrightson: You bet, I should mention what's in the works right now. We're trying to get *Captain Sternn* done as a CGI thing—either a feature film or a TV show or something.

CBM: That would be great. Didn't he make his first cinematic appearance in the *Heavy Metal* movie?

Wrightson: That's right. His first comic book appearance is in *Heavy Metal Magazine*

CBM: Yeah, I loved *Captain Sternn*. When I mentioned laughter that's what I think about.

Wrightson: Thank you. I did a five-issue thing of *Captain Sternn* years ago. And I had a lot of fun doing that. So we're trying to get it off the ground. And we'll see what happens.

[continued from page 26]

up the property. They gave *Tarzan* to Joe Kubert. Tarzan and his son Korak were the only characters from the extensive ERB oeuvre that Gold Key had mined. But now DC had all of the Edgar Rice Burroughs stuff, so they thought, "Why not do *John Carter of Mars*?" "Why not do *Carson of Venus*, or *Pellucidar*, or all the rest of it?" Add to that mix all these young artists who knew and grew up on these books (it had been the Frank Frazetta and Roy Krenkel covers that lured us in).

All of a sudden, I had the opportunity to draw Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Carson of Venus*! It made me very happy. I drew my heart out.

One of the real benefits to working at DC at this time was Neal Adams worked right there, in the offices. Neal was a big booster of all the young guys; he'd try his best to get everybody as much work as he possibly could, showing our work to the editors he was working with. He always had time to look at our stuff and say, "Try this," and then tell us we should take our work to a new magazine that was just starting; or he'd tell us he did some pencils that needed some ink..., that sort of kindness. He worked in a little room in the office. He did his very small layouts at home, then at the office he put them in the Art-o-graph, an opaque projector that enlarged and projected them on to the drawing paper. Then he would trace his own work, while editing it as an artist, making decisions, and produce finished pencil pages that astounded everyone. But during that time, if we weren't in the coffee room, we were in Neal's room, just standing against the wall talking about everything in the world while Neal did his work.

I was four or five issues into doing *Carson*, when word got out the editors were looking around for a *Shadow* artist. It was pretty much thought in the ranks that Jim Steranko was going to get it, because he wanted it badly and knew the subject matter backward and forward, and he was good

McCabe: Had he done any prior work for DC?

Kaluta: Nothing, nothing at all. There may have been some unrest over at Marvel or the lure of the character was such a strong pull, I just don't know. Bernie had done a brilliant *Shadow* ad for DC. I don't think anything I did, in those first *Shadow* things, ever lived up to that one dynamic shot Bernie did. Years passed since the ad, and everyone thought, if not Steranko it was Bernie who was going to do *The Shadow*—all was in flux. It seemed like years, maybe three years. But eventually Jim Steranko didn't get the job. It was rumored he wanted to write it himself. At that time there was no writer-artist on a DC comic book. The company didn't allow it. Bernie would have gotten the nod, but he and Len Wein were into the second issue of their *Swamp Thing* series. Here was this other twenty-page book! Bernie would not be able to handle both.

I've heard this so often, and I read it somewhere, so it could have actually happened [laughs], that I was sitting in the coffee room at the office, sitting by the vending machines with my friend Steve Harper. We would just go hang out there and draw, and every once in a while, somebody would come in. Sometimes it would be Gil Kane, who we didn't know personally; we knew who he was, though, and we would think, wow. Other times it would be someone we knew, someone like Bernie or one of the younger guys, or an editor. In this instance, Harper and I were sitting over in the corner of the coffee room, and Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates walked in and were mumbling and grumbling to each other. I said, "Hi, Denny. How you doing? What's up?" He said, mumbling, "Well, we're having trouble finding an artist for *The Shadow*."

I said, "I thought Jim Steranko was going to do it." He said, "Oh, no, he wanted to write it himself, and he can't do that." Denny's choice at the time would have been Jim Aparo, but Jim A. was tied up doing just about *everything* for DC. I said, "Oh, okay." I knew that Bernie wasn't going to be doing it because of *Swamp Thing*, so I went back to talking with Harper, and Harper said, "Ask him. Ask him if you can do it." I said, "They want Steranko, he's an expert. It's a twenty-page story—I can't do that kind of stuff!" He said, "Bullshit."

So I said, "Denny, uh, I think I can do it." I know it happened not exactly like, but very similarly to this. Denny said, "Hold on, I'll be right back." He got up, left—it didn't take long—he came back and said, "Okay, you got it." Just like that. My memory fades and I've been told that my good pal Ron Sutton was there at the offices plugging away for me on the deal. It's been said: Be careful what you wish for; I know that sometimes Denny's had cause to regret the decision; I was not an easy artist to work with. Looking back on it though, I think we did really good work together. We suited each other, and the product looked fine. But it would have been a lot better had I been on time with my work, or even close to being on time. [Laughs.]

McCabe: Had you been a fan of the character prior to that?

Kaluta: I had read one book when I was in junior high school, and I thought it really sucked; it was a paperback Belmont book. As it turns out—I found this out many years later—it was a book Belmont had hired somebody to do in the style of Walter Gibson, the Shadow pulp writer, not an actual story from the run of the Shadow pulps. There are two of these "new-style" novels out there, I think, and the one I read was written very badly. That's what I thought was a Shadow story. My friend Steve Hickman had this big picture of The Shadow hanging above his bed that he had painted in phosphorescent paints so that it would glow! He was the first person I called, asking, "What is this character about?" He gave me his expertise, whatever thoughts he had, and I went out and found the real paperbacks—*The Living Shadow*, *The Eyes of the Shadow*, and others. I started reading and found that, yes, indeed, I had a taste for the character. For some reason, I hardly had to research it: it just *flowed* out of me. I'm not sure why, but I certainly had an easy time with it. Mood-wise, more so than figure-conscious, I could do what The Shadow is about: foggy, mysterious and dark. And because it was foggy, mysterious and dark, I was able to get away with things I wouldn't have actually been able to draw. I could just mood-shift, the color would go in, and it would look mysterious. I didn't actually know how to draw a cuff on a pair of pants, but who was going to look at the cuff? They were looking at the gun.

I penciled and inked the first twenty-page story in about three months. It wasn't on deadline yet. But after that, it was on a deadline, a two-month deadline, which meant 20 pages penciled and inked every six weeks; and I'd never really had that *kind* of deadline. I'd always worked on *much* smaller single stories. I think if I'd worked like I was supposed to, each day and every day, I could have met the deadline. But I just wasn't used to it. When the deadline set in I took to worrying about what I was doing. The first issue looked so good. So many wonderful little things happened while drawing the first one, clever drawing things that I never expected myself to be able to do. I choked on issue two. The issue's art looks fine in retrospect, but while drawing I was having such trouble trying to do what I had done in the first one, and in less time. By the time I was doing the third issue, I had to call Bernie in to help. He did some penciling and some inking, I did some penciling and some inking, and we had a ball. We made up a little bit of the time I'd lost.

On the fourth issue, I was into the art and the world as much as I was with the first issue, but I slowed down. I had a pile of friends do some panels, but the lion's share of the book was on my shoulders. I wanted all the buildings, wherever you looked, to have detail and authenticity. I got it done two or three weeks late. By then, the brass had had it with me, and they got Frank Robbins to do a fill-in issue. It was apt punishment, as I really wish I could have done that issue! While they were doing the fill-in fifth issue, I did the sixth issue and finally did it on time. During this time I was also adapting, writing, and drawing the five-page *Carson of Venus* stories. It's funny to me now, but during this time, I'd say, "I'm not good enough for this. I'm not up to scratch." That would stop me from drawing even more. But, in retrospect, I see I was doing twenty-five pages of penciling and inking in two months, and good stuff—it was good. So I shouldn't have been so hard on myself.

When I finished the sixth issue I was called into Carmine Infantino's office. He asked me how I was doing, if I was feeling good. "Because," he said, "you're missing deadlines on this thing." I said, "Yeah, I know, but I also have this other stuff," which he didn't know I was doing. He said, "That's more your kind of stuff. Your Shadow stuff isn't really your kind of stuff, is it? I said, "Well, no." And I basically wussed out. And they took it away from me. At the same time, the company policy regarding the Edgar Rice Burroughs stuff was such that, because they were paying so much money to use the Edgar Rice Burroughs characters, they couldn't really pay the kind of money they had previously been paying the artists to do the work. DC had also just brought in these fantastic Philippino artists who could pencil, ink *and* letter for twenty-six dollars a page. That was a *third* of what I was getting just for the penciling and inking. I tried to adapt; I got a couple of pages into the next Carson story, but I couldn't get the ball rolling at one-third the paycheck. Within about two or three weeks, both *The Shadow* and *Carson of Venus* were over.

By then, I was also doing covers, for *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets*. And that's where I ended up doing most of the next several years' work: lots of covers. I came back at the end of *The Shadow*'s run and did the last four or five covers. I did a couple of stories and many covers for Julius Schwartz and Murray Boltinoff, indicia pages and covers for Joe Orlando's *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets*, *Batman* and *Detective Comics* covers and went on from there

It was about '74 or '75. In 1976, I stopped drawing comic books and started doing full-blown poster illustration. For really no money—I'd get maybe five hundred dollars for a poster, and stretch that out for as long as I could.

McCabe: Not to dwell too much on *The Shadow*, but a lot of people regard the work you did on that character as legendary. What do you think was so appealing about the character?

Kaluta: Well, the character really did brook no insult; he really was the judge, jury and executioner. These days almost every comic book character is that way, Batman certainly. Batman was the closest thing to The Shadow back then too, but he still had much more of a moral code. The Shadow had no recognizable moral code, except the one he had made for himself. I know in discussions both Denny and I had our reservations about just how psychotic and brutal this Shadow guy was. But we got letters, and they all said, "This is the kind of character we love. He goes after the bad guys and he just stops them. They're no longer bad guys." Of course that was The Shadow's original appeal, I think. Why was this character so popular on the radio and in the pulps? Because there was a formula. First of all, he knew everything that was going on. But rather than just say, "Okay, I know what's going on. That's a bad person—I'll go and kill him," he would set it up so that person would be given a choice, and confront him, saying, "Here are the things you've done to everybody, and reasons that you should be atoning for. Now you have the choice of atoning, or taking the consequences." And invariably, they took the consequences and that's when they go over the cliff in the car with the brakes that no longer work. The Shadow had doctored them. But had the bad guys gone straight, they wouldn't have gotten in the car. It was always a big set-up, and The Shadow was always several steps ahead of the bad guys. Even when it looked like The Shadow was in darkest peril of being captured, killed, or lost, he always had it set up so that was only the way it *appeared*, for his own purposes. One of the small contentions I had with one or two of the stories was where the agents would say, "Oh, but you failed." If you read the books you'll see, the agents never doubted The Shadow, never believed he failed—the only reason they were with him was because he never failed. He was the bedrock of their lives. They had all failed in one way or another, giving up, and The Shadow had come in right at the end, put himself before them and said, "I'm your foundation, I'll use you, but I'll never waste you." They could build on that to become the best people they could, while helping fight crime and "wrong-doing." Underneath, they knew, here was a guy who would always do what was right, would always get it done.

When Chaykin did his four-issue series, the only contention I had with it was that somebody who wanted to get to The Shadow attacked his agents and brutally killed them trying to get The Shadow to come out of "retirement." When The Shadow finally did, he was kind of grumpy about it. Well, that's *not* The Shadow. As he said, "I would never waste your lives," but he might use them, and if the evil was *so* bad that they had to die for The Shadow to finally wipe him up, that wouldn't be a waste. The approach that Chaykin took was to have The Shadow betray the agents, ignore them as nuisances from his past. I just disagreed with that. It's a minor thing.

McCabe: I remember O'Neil saying the way he came to terms with the character was to regard him as a force of nature. So that fits your concept, because a force of nature can't *betray* you. It simply is—there's no doubt.

Kaluta: Yes, and had they bothered doing that in the film, we'd be watching the fifth or sixth one now. We'd be saying, "Oh, look what's coming out—*Matrix 2*, *Harry Potter 2*, *Lord of the Rings 2* and *The Shadow 4*." [Laughs.] Because he's that strong a character if he's done right. The Hollywood types missed the neat stuff that was unique to his character. There's no other character like The Shadow! They just tossed the good stuff aside and went for something else. It's too bad for that movie, because it looked pretty good, visually, but someone will come along and eventually do the character right in a film. I'm sure.

McCabe: You actually worked on the film, didn't you?

Kaluta: In a way, I did, yes. I supplied the producer, Michael Bregman, with all the work that I'd ever done in the comics and posters, etc.

I also worked for two days with Carl Fullerton, the makeup artist on the film. Carl won an Academy Award that year for his makeup for Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia*. Carl had a lot of ideas he wanted to bring to *The Shadow*, ideas which were as ignored as my telling them to get a better script (I was not alone in that). We did a lot of drawings. Somewhere in his archives are all sorts of drawings of Lamont Cranston with piercing and weird hairdos for the earlier part of the movie. Most of the drawings were traced over photographs of Alec Baldwin. What Carl said, as I got ready to draw, was, "I can't cut into the skin. We have Alec Baldwin's face, so everything we do has to be applied to it. But what I can do is make him look like he has a big fat head."

Well, the thing about Alec Baldwin—marvelous as he is—he's the boy next door. He was kind of a chubby guy. He didn't have that hollowed-out Shadow face; you had to build up the

cheekbones. I showed Carl how to do it on top of the photographs, and he said, "What happens to his chin?" I said, "His chin is going to be behind that scarf. You're not going to have that big, built-up chin. It's going to look goofy without the scarf, because the nose will extend down over Alec's top lip. He'll look like a guy with a big nose and a little chin, but nobody's going to see that because he'll have it covered."

In the movie, they didn't quite understand that the scarf wasn't supposed to visibly wrap around like a bandage. It was supposed to fold, to stay in the front. Ah, well....

They did two movies basically: the Alec Baldwin/Lamont Cranston story, and some Shadow shots. Some of the visuals looked so exciting, but they never paid off—at least for me. But I couldn't fault the atmosphere.

McCabe: You had other significant Shadow stories. You did "In the Toils of Wing-Fat," in *The Private Files of the Shadow*, and you did *Hitler's Astrologer*.

Kaluta: The 15-page story "In the Toils of Wing-Fat" came about when I was told by DC that they were going to re-publish, in a slick format, all of the Shadow stories I'd done. I said, "Well, as a sales point, would you like to have something new in there too?" They said, "Yes, that would be kind of nice." I got an interesting contract—it said I was going to get the standard reprint fees. I said, "Well, why am I doing fifteen new pages if I'm not going to get royalties for the new pages?" They said, "You're going to be paid to draw them." I said, "Yes, but if I was doing them in a regular comic book, I'd be paid for them, and I'd get royalties." Eventually it worked out to be quite a nice contract, and it was fun. I got to write the story, as well as draw it up, and I had a real good time doing it.

McCabe: That's the story I show people when I show them your Shadow work. As good as the original stories were, one can see in that story how your style had truly evolved. There's a meticulousness to it. It looks like a set of incredible storyboards for a never-filmed Indiana Jones movie.

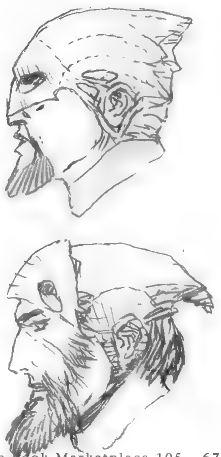
Kaluta: Why, thank you! One of the reasons it looked the way it did was I had done all the other Shadow stories way back when, before I could draw. Denny and DC really took a flyer on me: in 1973 I was very wet behind the ears. If you look at those first five Shadow stories, from panel to panel, I'm learning to draw. There's a lot of neat effects and mood, but if you watch the faces, there's some pretty awful stuff in there. It gets better and better as I go along. By the time I did "In the Toils of Wing-Fat," I knew how to draw, I knew how to compose, and I knew how to tell a story. I'd done all that stuff at lots of other places; I'd done tons of covers, and I was coming back to something I'd done before. I got to do *my* little story *my* way. When I drew it I was in my prime. [Laughs.]

McCabe: And then you came back to the character yet again with the graphic novel, *Hitler's Astrologer*. How did that come about?

Kaluta: That project should have reflected all the good guys that were involved in it, but its fate was star-crossed in a way. Maybe, on one level, it should never have been done. DC had let their Shadow license lapse. Marvel, unbeknownst to almost anyone, had asked the licensors if Marvel could do a Shadow graphic novel. Marvel got a contract for a couple of years to do it. One day I got a call from Denny, who was editing at Marvel at the time. He said, "I just found out that Marvel has the rights to do a Shadow graphic novel. Let's put the team together." I said, "Absolutely, let's do it," and I called up Bernie and said, "Do you want to ink this?" We had done a few things together, including some Shadow stuff and it all looked pretty good. He said, "Sure, okay."

The idea was that Denny would write the story, I would pencil it and Bernie would ink it; and the contractual agreement was that we were going to split it three ways, which was unusual. The penciler generally gets the most money, the inker the next most, and the writer—because his work is supposed to be quicker to do—the least. But this was going to be different, split evenly between three guys. Frankly, I was very disappointed with the original script. It was not a graphic novel script, to me, it was just a story. I may have just been hyper, keyed-up, or something, but that's where my professionalism stops. Rather than calling up Denny and saying, "Can we punch this thing up?" I rewrote it without telling anybody. As it turned out, the editor hadn't read the original. He'd passed it on to me as a "read" script. I called him on it a few times, saying, "Do you know what's going on in this scene?" "Don't worry about it," he said, "It's great, just draw it." I thought, you know, he hasn't read this thing. And since he hasn't read it, I'll rewrite it.

When we first put our heads together Denny and I were trying to come up with something to make a great graphic novel. My pal Steve Hickman had been reading



about Hitler and The Spear of Destiny, so I aired out the "Spear of Destiny" booshwa. Hitler was supposed to be going around grabbing occult artifacts (see *Indiana Jones*, etc.), and having astrologers and the Black Llama and who-knows-what going on while bringing Western Civilization to its knees. Of course, later when I started working on the story, I found the most you could really say about Hitler that was documented, as far as the occult goes, was that he was a vegetarian—The End!

Apparently he didn't really hold with the rest of that stuff. All of those people surrounding him, however, especially Hess, were deep into all kinds of mumbo-jumbo. Goebbels didn't really believe it, but he knew it was a fantastic tool, so he used it to manipulate as many people as he could, and, at the same time, was actually manipulated by it, by the British, though this bit didn't enter into the story. In the '30s and '40s there was this big war for the hearts and minds of the people going on, using that which the people were into: the stars, the Tarot, the occult. All these things that for some reason people believe more than, perhaps, the truth. Having learned all that, I thought, Hess has got to be the focus, not Hitler; as it turns out, Hitler's really just "there." Denny had a really good bare-bones plot, but, as far as I was concerned, he hadn't done any research. I read the diaries of Goebbels, and I made sure everything in the story happened when it actually happened in history. There are a lot of quotes in the copy now. I really should have gone to Denny after doing all that, or at least before drawing, and said, "This is what I'd like to do." We'd all have had a *lot* more fun! But, by that time, I was miffed at everybody—by that time, Bernie had decided he wasn't going to ink it either—and I didn't know what I was going to do, because it was such a big job, and I'd drawn so much of it already on the type board that Bernie had requested. If I'd had a hand in choosing who'd ink the thing when Bernie bugged out, I've no idea to this day whom that would have been. The editor, Larry Hama, decided on Russ Heath. I said, "But it was supposed to be Bernie. I did it for Bernie. If you're going to have an inker, it's got to be a brush inker with *verve*." Russ Heath is a brilliant artist, but he doesn't have Bernie's *verve*. And I said, "Every place where I knew Bernie was going to throw the brush around Pow! Boom! Bam!—I didn't bother to draw it! Folds, capes, smoke, fire: why draw what Bernie will bring to the mix? But I knew Bernie couldn't give a damn about a real pistol, couldn't give a damn about a real car. He would draw a box with wheels, like a tinker toy, he wouldn't care. So I drew all the cars, all the weapons, all the planes in excruciating detail, knowing Bernie would *love* to just follow the lines on them.

On the other hand Russ had no trouble at *all* with guns, planes and cars. I could have drawn a stick or a twig, and said, "This is a Luger," and Bam! It would have been a Luger. Russ knows that stuff. What the strip lost—and it was a subtle loss, just a little bit off—The Shadow became a man in a suit, as opposed to a force of nature, and I had drawn it as a force of nature knowing Bernie would *ink* it as a force of nature. The story was about the coming together of three such forces. The final story itself, I'm still phenomenally proud of, but hey: the color sucked. It was everybody's fault: we didn't know what we were doing. We were trying to do it in the European fashion: the blue line, full color process. There are maybe twelve to twenty-four brilliantly colored pages, and then about twelve to twenty-four really awful colored pages. The reason for that: maybe sixteen to twenty-four different people were coloring it, just coloring away, without any reference to what other people were doing—this was necessary just to get the job out the door on time. That was a shame, after all the work by all the folks..., it didn't deserve that. Looking at the originals, and seeing the phenomenal work Russ put into them, one can see it was so much better than the printed version.

The worst thing about the entire deal occurred when the book came out. As good or bad as it was, technically, Denny had to face people asking, "When you wrote this book, what did you mean by such-and-so?" Denny would have to answer, "I didn't write that." I did it wrong, but I just had to make a good story.

McCabe: I was surprised to see you worked on the Dark Horse comic book movie adaptation of *The Shadow* as well.

Kaluta: If you read the movie

adaptation, you'll find it's a better movie.

McCabe: You're right. The adaptation's story is better than the film's.

Kaluta: Joel Goss, the writer, had the idea to frame the center story with the tale of this down-on-his-luck newspaper guy who'd heard an interesting story, and who came into a bar and told Harry Vincent. The whole story is the absolute truth, but at the end of it, as the writer is leaving, the bartender is revealed to the reader as The Shadow—you could see the ring on his hand when he's mixing the drinks. He and Harry had gotten the information out of the guy, put him in a place where he wasn't going to tell anybody else, and then burned the notes. We left it like that, and we had a ball doing it.

We originally scanned the film script into an optical character-recognition program so we had an editable copy, then we just cut out pages and pages of crap. Crap! We tried to make the movie ideas make sense, tried to make The Shadow, again, someone who *made* himself vulnerable so that this very powerful man would come from his seat of power in the East, where he was dangerous, to New York, where The Shadow had a little more of an edge. It was all a lure. That's what The Shadow would do.

McCabe: A lot of your work in the eighties and nineties was cover work. I suppose that's what you derive the most enjoyment from these days. What appeals to you about cover work?

Kaluta: Trying to evoke an incident or tease the reader into opening the book to find out why it looks the way it does. And to show off some technique, or some viewpoint. A lot of the cover imagery is set up to excite the viewer, as opposed to even being involved with the characters. At the same time I want to stay true to the interior characters and the way they develop in the story.

McCabe: I heard you had an interesting experience doing some *Vampirella* covers.

Kaluta: The first interesting thing is that I had never worked with Warren on any of his books, especially *Vampirella*. I tried two or three times, but I could never get past the persona he showed me. Otherwise, I might have done very good work for him. And of course, I was inspired by much of the work he'd published. I got a call one day from an editor I'd known from another company who had just started working for Harris Publishing. He said, "Look, we have the Vampirella rights, and we're coming out with a story arc—and we'd like you to do the covers. Our editor-in-chief doesn't really know comics. He does rock-and-roll and *Good Housekeeping*-type magazines, and he has a small publishing empire of things like *Yarn Weekly*. But he wants to be involved in the *Vampirella* magazine, so bring your work in." What the boss liked about Vampirella was that she was this big girl, this big, zaftig, nearly-naked girl. When I did my first cover for him it had so much of everything I ever wanted to have in a cover. It had Vampirella doing something with her hair, demons and some kind of subliminal skull with her head on one side of it, all kinds of movement. I showed it to the boss-editor, and he said, "She looks a little skinny. She looks like an art-deco figurine." "That's what I draw," I said.

Now, I like the Anita Ekberg type, and the way the Italian artists drew Vampirella, like an Amazon, big and strong, but all I could think was, that's going to ruin my composition. For me it's not about muscle, it's not about beef, or cheese. It's about the shape that her body's in.

Well, to make up for the fact that I'd given him this very elegant first cover, for the second cover I drew a picture of Vampirella with her butt in the air, like a stretching cat, surrounded with other cats. One of the cats had turned into a man..., a dead man—it was sexy and dangerous. The boss-editor loved it. Couldn't say [enough] about it.

By the end of the story arc I'd done two more covers he was fine with, but they didn't break any new ground in the sexy woman department for him. They made cards out of the covers, and posters that I sell, but I was never invited to go to a convention because Harris artists were going nor did I ever get to hang out at their booth with the various Vampirella models. Life is unfair! I'm not sure what the bottom line is regarding what Harris thinks of those covers. I was really happy to have done them, because they gave me a chance to codify what I would do if I did the character.

McCabe: The period at which you worked at DC was a very fertile period that produced a diverse assortment of books, so many of which were of a quality that one doesn't see much today. Do you think it's possible for some company to regain that glory, or is the industry in such a state that it doesn't seem likely?

Kaluta: I think it's very possible. Just before the time that Wrightson, Chaykin, Simonson, Weiss, Adams, et al began working, there were no hills or valleys in the comic book world. It had been just business as usual. The fear-haunted fifties were forgotten, but at the end of the '60s the editors started to bring back the monster books. People wanted monsters, that kind of excitement and danger. The approach was, however, done in a very cautious way. Comic companies had really had their faces punched, as opposed to hands slapped, by the '50s trials. Writers and artists were becoming excited as the new

"mystery" books started appearing, because it was very fertile ground, the new creators had all supped at the table that the EC comics had set, and drunk the fine wine that was *The Twilight Zone* on TV and they wanted their chance at the cuisine-art.

As far as the question: Can It Happen Again? I knew the personalities of that time, but I don't know the personalities now, so I don't know what today's personalities would bring to the present incarnations of Marvel, or DC, or another company. Whether they want to make a lot of money, whether they want to write/draw Lara Croft over and over again; whether it's just a job; whether it's a dream. The most positive thing I see coming out of what's happened with comics in the '90s is the thriving small press—it used to be the "underground," or "ground-level publishing"—but it really has a lot more of the "need-to-do" talent in it. They're doing their own stories, their own way, publishing them the way they can. It's a huge funfest. There's so much good stuff there, the fact that it doesn't bring in big bucks shouldn't be the basis for its value-judgment.

When Elaine Lee and I did *Starstruck* for Marvel's Epic line our contract wasn't renewed because we weren't selling in excess of 60,000 copies. Our editor said, "Well, you know, it wasn't a good comic." I said, "What do you mean? It was a great comic. It just wasn't a 'successful' comic." She said, "Yeah, that's what I meant."

She and I knew what she meant was "we didn't make enough money off it, so we had to cancel it." But any comic book company today would love making the numbers we made on *Starstruck*.

Back then, if you sold forty-thousand comics you were in the basement. Now, if you sell twenty-thousand comics, people will say, "Hey, good sales this week."

When *The Dark Knight Returns* came out, it had the same basic effect on the comics business. It was like a neutron bomb. And it didn't necessarily mean everybody drew or wrote like that, but people paid attention to it. I can't remember exactly when *Watchmen* came out, but I wonder whether people would have paid as much attention to *Watchmen*, which was very dry, very paced—and you had to bring things to *Watchmen* to enjoy it—whether as many people would have seen how great that thing was had they not been goosed by this other thing. One was really pre-digested and thrown in your face, but all of a sudden you smelled like it—it was like a skunk or a perfume. It got on you, changed you, whether you wanted it to or not. *Watchmen* was there to be picked up and put down, but no one could put it down once they picked it up. I don't know what would have happened had they not gotten in the mood. But after *Dark Knight Returns*, everyone was in the mood for comics.

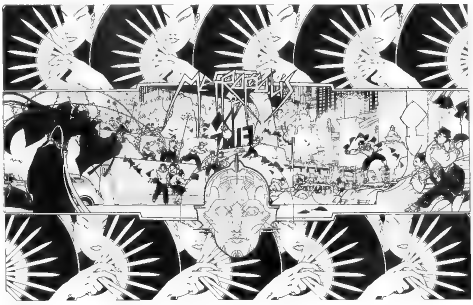
McCabe: *Dark Knight Returns* is interesting. In popular literature, it's equivalent to *Lord of the Rings*, or in films *Star Wars*. One could argue it's not the greatest, most original story in the world, or that its ingredients have been better prepared elsewhere. One could nitpick all they want, but for some reason its elements came together in a certain way, at a certain time and place, and in the context of that story, it all works, and any criticism becomes moot. It seems to pull the medium in a new direction.

Kaluta: Right. On the other hand, I'm not sure, but I think a book like *From Hell* is written strictly for fans. I personally think so. I don't know if anybody who picked it up wasn't a comic book fan or wasn't waiting to see what Alan Moore wrote next. But with *Watchmen*, people would pick it up and hand it to somebody else, telling them they *had* to read it. And the company was so impressed with it, they put hardback books out, and slipcased it, and addressed it like what it really was—which was the monolith for goodness sake! They had something they could finally brag about. Did they brag enough? I wonder.

McCabe: Thank you very much, M.W.

Kaluta: You're quite welcome.

Joseph McCabe is a contributing editor of Comic Book Artist, *and an assistant editor of* Weird Tales. *His essays and interviews, frequently accompanied by the work of photographer Sophia Quach, have appeared in such publications as the* Comics Buyer's Guide, Science Fiction Chronicle, SFX *and the* New York Review of Science Fiction.



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making sure that they're not oversaturated. The problem with video is that the white really tends to blow out and I think there's a couple of instances in our film where that happened, and once that happens the information's lost so you can't get it back, but I think for the most part we did a pretty good job of making it look good as far as the lighting and the style of the film.

Ringgenberg: Did working in a digital medium make it easier when you went to edit it?

Laspina: Yeah, and working digitally is the whole reason why we could make the film. Otherwise, if we had to shoot on film, it wouldn't have been made because it would have been too expensive. I ended up paying for the film myself and since I worked in visual effects before and I had gone to film school and had toyed around with video cameras and stuff, I was pretty familiar with video, and the fact that you can go right from the camera into the computer directly—no development costs, no scanning costs—that definitely saved time and money. We were able to go from the camera right to the computer, do some edits, put it back out to tape and send it off to someone to watch. Probably the best word I can say for digital video is that it's very convenient.

Ringgenberg: Since you were financing it yourself, were you forced to stop at certain points and go off to work?

Laspina: Yeah, and that's why the film took so long. For the first two and a half years I was working on other Hollywood projects as well. And it was killing me because usually when I was working on something else I was putting in a lot of hours and I couldn't devote any time to the Frazetta project, so my work really came in spurts for a while there, and then eventually I got to the point where…I was going so crazy I thought, "I'm never going to get this film done if I don't stop working on other films." So I just made the decision, talked to my—she was then my girlfriend, she's now my wife—but talked to her and made the decision that I have to start refusing work and just focus on this project. And at first it was really hard to do, because any time you're turning down work it's a hard decision to make.

Ringgenberg: Let me get back to editing for a minute. To get the length you wanted did you have to edit out anything really choice?

Laspina: We started off with about a three-and-a-half hour cut, I think, and had to edit it down…. We did it in stages and eventually ended up with about a 96-minute project. But anytime you cut something out that you didn't want to cut out, it's like cutting off an arm or a finger or something like that. But the thing is with the DVD medium it makes it a lot less painful because you realize they will get a chance to see it at some point. It may not be in the body of the film, but they're going to have it on these extra features. And there is just a lot of stuff…we shot in Brooklyn with Frank at Coney Island, him at the shooting gallery, and…there was no way to validate putting it in the film—it's still good footage, but it just didn't have any relationship to what was going on in the film, like the sections that we chose to put in the film, so it's just stuff that we're going to have to put on the DVD as an extra feature. We shot so much footage—I'm probably guessing 100 to 150 hours worth of footage and this was spread out over a period of three and a half years almost. The film is only 96 minutes so all that other footage, even if a small percentage, say twenty-five percent, of it is good, that still leaves a lot of extra footage.

[continued on page 77]

by Michael Naiman

Upstairs, Downstairs; San Diego-style

The San Diego show has come and gone for a month now and Chicago was last week (when I write this) so nothing about that event. The SD show was bigger than one could possibly imagine. Hats off to VP of Exhibits Beth Holley and her crew for the endless hours of preparation involved. Another job well done.

This was the first time in five years that I actually found a ton of books in an affordable GD/VG/FN condition that were priced right by many vendors. There were more people at the show than I've ever seen before.

I hope that next year they place *all* comic dealers in one place on the convention floor. With close to 500,000 square feet of space, these legs can only handle so much walking.

One big thrill for me at the SD show was to actually touch George Reeves' Superman costume. Superman's 48-year-old legendary costume for the 1955 TV series *The Adventures of Superman* that starred Reeves in the title role was sold at auction on July 31st for $129,800 by Joseph Maddalena and his Beverly Hills-based company Profiles in History.

Earlier this year, Profiles in History auctioned off Captain Kirk's command chair from the 1960s *Star Trek* TV series for $305,000. Other items that sold at this auction include: Derelict ship from *Alien* and *Aliens* – $47,200; Jim Carrey Riddler costume from *Batman Forever* – $10,620; Harrison Ford pistol from *Blade Runner* – $20,060; Dr. Zaius costume and display from *Planet of the Apes* – $56,050; Dr. Milo Ape-o-naut suit from *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* – $64,900; USS Enterprise bridge railing segment from *Star Trek* – $26,550; USS Enterprise bridge chair from *Star Trek* – $26,550; Nichelle Nichols' personal scripts from *Star Trek* – $35,400; Agridome used in *Battlestar Galactica* and *Silent Running* – $12,980; Vulpa Cylon Centurion costume from *Battlestar Galactica* – $32,450; Silver Cylon Centurion costume from *Battlestar Galactica* – $32,450; large matte painting of New Chicago from *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* – $5,900; Spice Harvester carry-all ship from *Dune* – $6,490.

Some of the real action actually started before the show opened. Heritage Comics held their Signature Auction #807 from July 15-20 upstairs in one of the convention rooms. I spent part of Tuesday at the comic auction and almost all of Wednesday at the original art auction.

There were plenty of people in the room looking for art bargains. Bargains? Ha!—but they were selling anyway. Very few items passed. I must also give kudos to the auctioneer who kept things moving at a very brisk pace. No time to dilly-dally here.

Some sample original art sales: Wally Wood *Incredible Science Fiction* #33 cover (EC, 1956) $26,450; Wally Wood *Shock SuspenStories* #3 cover (EC, 1952) $12,650; Wally Wood *The Spirit* Sunday supplement, page 1 (Will Eisner Productions, 1952) $9,200; Joe Shuster Superman illustration (DC, 1940s) $6,900; Frank Frazetta *Famous Funnies* #215 cover (Eastern Color, 1955) $80,500; Jack Kirby and Joe Simon *Green Hornet* #9 cover (Harvey, 1942) $10,925; Jack Kirby *Sgt. Fury* #4, page 2 (Marvel, 1963) $1,380; Jack Kirby and Mike Esposito *Tales to Astonish* #69, complete 10-page story, "Trapped in the Lair of the Leader" $6,612; Neal Adams *Ben Casey* group of 3 dailies, $661; Berkeley Breathed *Bloom County* Sunday dated 1-13-88 $2,760; Hal Foster *Prince Valiant* Sunday dated 12-21-52 (King Features Syndicate, 1952) $32,200; Chester Gould *Dick Tracy* daily dated 12-30-40 (Chicago Tribune, 1940) $718; Hal Foster *Prince Valiant* panel $1,150; Burne Hogarth *Tarzan* Sunday dated 2-1-48 $9,200; the first Bob Montana *Archie* Sunday $23,000; John Romita, Sr. *Spider-Man* Sunday dated 5-28-78 $2,185; Charles Schulz *Peanuts* daily dated 4-23-53 $9,200; Charles Schulz *Peanuts* daily dated 12-3-53 $5.750; Neal Adams *The Brave and the Bold* #83, page 4 $891; Frank Giacoia *Green Lantern* #78, page 23 $1,840; Dick Ayers *Strange Tales* #118, complete 13-page story, "The Man Who Became the Torch!" (Marvel, 1964) $4,175; Dick Ayers *Tales to Astonish* #55, page 4 (Marvel, 1964) $126; Dick Ayers *Tales to Astonish* #57, page 13 (Marvel, 1964) $402; C. C. Beck - *Captain Marvel Adventures* #5, story page 1 (Fawcett, 1941) $2,760; C.C. Beck *Four Color* #123 cover re-creation (Dell, 1946) $1,495; Boring "Superboy #1" cover re-creation painting (DC, 1982) $1,840; John Byrne Black Widow sketch (1976) $977; John Byrne & Frank Giacoia *Marvel Team-Up* #53, pages 6 & 7 (Marvel, 1977) $4,600; John Byrne and Terry Austin *X-Men* #120, page 1 (Marvel, 1979) $11,500; John Byrne & Terry Austin *X-Men* #132, page 22 (Marvel, 1980) $8,625; Nick Cardy *Legion of Super-Heroes* #1 (DC, 1973) $8,912; Gene Colan and Frank Giacoia *Daredevil* #27 cover (Marvel, 1967)

[continued on page 77]

CBM Market Watch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

Adventure
#153 FN $150 77%
#222 VF $88 49%
#232 VF $93 52%
#235 VF $82 46%
#247 VG $407 60%
#253 VF $78 44%
#254 VF $67 47%
#263 VF $72 73%
#264 VF $87 89%
#285 VF/NM $82 54%
#246 (Mohawk)
VF/NM $137 57%

All Good Comics
#1 VF/NM $101 50%

All Great Comics
#1 VF/NM $72 36%

All Winners
#16 GD $293 2.17X
#19 VG "$1.325" 1.56X

Amazing
#1 VG $255 61%

Amazing Fantasy
#15 GD "$2.025" 1.63X

Amazing Spider-Man
#1 VG "$2.600" 1.54X
#14 FN $943 1.96X

Archie
#53 NM $122 98%

Astonishing
#7 VG $42 64%

Atom
#1 FN $305 1.39X
#4 (Winnipeg)
VF/NM $122 71%

Avengers
#1 VG $620 1.37X

Batman
#113 VF+ $81 69%
#139 VF/NM $58 50%
#165 VF $124 56%
#[illegible] NM $290 2.07X
#234 NM $190 1.09X

Brave & Bold
#28 VG $356 46%
#29 VG $165 48%
#30 VG $100 36%
#34 VG+ $210 57%
#35 VF $270 72%
#96 NM $24 75%

Captain America
#109 VF/NM $30 41%
#38 GD $262 1.34X

Captain Science
#7 VG $68 85%

Challengers of the Unknown
#1 VG $222 59%
#2 FN $111 55%
#7 VF $165 46%
#18 VF+ $41 45%

Daredevil
#1 FN+ $560 1.02X
#1 FN $405 74%
#1 VG $367 Guide
#1 GD $254 1.39X

Dark Mansion of Forbidden Love
#1 VF/NM $92 59%

Detective
#112 VG $80 55%
#172 VG- $47 43%
#193 VG+ $53 48%
#202 VF+ $155 51%
#208 FN+ $170 1.11X
#223 FN+ $70 54%
#224 FN- $62 48%
#265 VF+ $81 36%

Fantastic Four
#1 GD "$1,675" 1.99X
#54 FN $45 2.14X
#72 VF- $30 66%
#75 VF $50 1.19X
#76 VF/NM $55 Guide
#77 VF/NM $60 1.07X
#79 VF/NM $60 1.22X

Flash
#106 VG+ $178 65%
#110 VG $81 36%
#116 VF+ $136 81%

Ghosts
#4 NM $37 74%

Green Lantern
#1 GD $223 98%
#3 FN $168 1.4X
#4 VF $154 67%
#9 VF $82 49%
#10 VF $142 85%
#40 VF $222 64%
#59 VF/NM $145 71%
#88 NM $33 94%

Hand of Fate
#12 VG $21 50%

Hawkman
#5 VF/NM $64 50%

House of Mystery
#143 VF $64 41%
#144 VF/NM $27 28%

Jonah Hex
#1 VF+ $22 32%

Journey into Mystery
#83 VG $938 1.3X

Journey into Unknown Worlds
#10 VG $70 64%
#28 VG $47 87%
#52 NM $200 1.3X

Justice League of America
#1 VG $314 55%
#2 VG $77 60%
#3 FN $113 68%
#4. VF- $100 33%
#5 FN $66 71%
#9 VF $140 45%
#17 VF+ $69 55%
#18 VF+ $73 58%
#20 VF/NM $45 26%

Marvel Premiere
#1 NM $56 80%
#2 NM $22 73%

Marvel Tales
#3 VF+ $17 43%
#5 VF/NM $16 50%

Mystery in Space
#54 VG+ $42 49%
#65 VG+ $26 76%
#87 VF $50 36%
#89 VF $62 53%

Nick Fury
#1 VF $65 73%

Our Army at War
#4 VG $50 52%

Richie Rich
#2 FN $322 2.14X

Sgt. Fury
#5 VG $23 55%

Showcase
#7 GD $85 61%
#12 FN $320 80%
#16 VG $123 81%
#19 VG $81 37%
#23 VG+ $158 65%
#30 VF+ $315 58%
#31 VF+ $160 58%
#33 VF- $113 38%
#36 VF $161 40%

Silver Surfer
#3 VF/NM $135 82%

Sinister House
#1 VF+ $78 70%

Speed
#43 VG $76 79%

Spooky
#5 VG+ $10 42%

Strange Tales
#59 NM $355 1.29X
#93 VF/NM $144 97%
#116 VF $83 99%
#138 NM $31 51%
#139 VF $27 71%
#140 VF $27 71%
#145 NM $33 73%
#146 VF $23 79%
#149 NM $52 1.15X
#151 NM $82 96%

Sub-Mariner
#8 VF/NM $35 71%
#9 NM $22 49%

Sub-Mariner Comics
#28 FN+ $366 1.22X

Suspense (Atlas)
#7 VG $30 50%
#22 FN $42 56%
#27 NM $202 96%
#29 VG $38 86%

Tales of Suspense
#31 VG $56 1.27X
#34 VG $24 66%
#36 VG+ $69 1.91X
#37 FN $65 1.2X
#50 VG+ $25 74%
#73 NM- $32 53%

Uncanny Tales
#27 VG $30 60%
#44 NM $150 91%

Web of Evil
#1 VG $103 94%

Weird Science
#12(#1) VG $141 38%

Wings
#95 VF+ $134 1.17X

Wonder Woman
#165 VF $32 84%

X-Men
#1 VG "$1,135" 98%
#1 VG $770 66%
#1 VG $730 63%
#1 GD $550 95%
#1 GD $450 78%
#94 VF/NM $255 51%

Young Allies
#17 VG $148 77%
#20 FN $255 88%

Jamie Newbold
Southern California Comics
8280 Clairemont Mesa #124
San Diego, CA 92111
858-715-8669

Greetings. Post-Comic-Con International stress has dissipated and our store is back in one piece! A great show, as usual, with plenty of sales to record. We want to thank the fellow comic book dealers who struck deals with us at the show. Those purchases will go far in keeping our regular store customers happy. We also want to thank the many customers who shopped our booths and made the show a financial success. We met quite a few customers who previously shopped from us online. Glad to see how many of you took your vacations in our hometown of San Diego. I hope the long lines to get in were tolerable! Now, onto the comics:

Golden Age: *All-Flash* #26 G/VG $85; *All-New Comics* #7 restored $114; *All-True Detective* #2 VG/F $55; *Detective Comics* #82 VG $140; *Flash Comics* #73 VG $144; *Frontline Combat* #8 F/VF $85; *Joe Palooka* #7 NM- $135; *Jungle Comics* #46 VG/F $80; *Lone Ranger* #75 VF- $30; *Mystery in Space* #5 FN- $155; *Superman* #28 restored $125, #61 restored $150, #100 G/VG $325; *Thrilling Adventures in Stamps* #8 VG $122; *Women Outlaws* nn CGC 8.0 $190; *World's Finest* #4 VF $1100.

Silver Age: *Adventure Comics* #282 VG $50; *Amazing Spider-Man* #8 FN $245, #14 FN $500, #57 VF+ $76; *Daredevil* #5 F/VF $119; *Detective Comics* #370 VF/NM $45; *Fantastic Four* #6 GD+ $160, #7 F/VF $373, #8 F/VF $405, #9 F/VF $400, #58 VF/NM $69, #112 VF $60; *Hawkman* #4 VF+ $150; *Iron Man* #10 VF+ $44; *Mystery in Space* #53 VG/F $360; *Our Army At War* #115 CGC 8.0 $90; *Rocky and his Fiendish Friends* #1 NM- $250; *Showcase* #15 VG $300; *Silver Surfer* #4 FN $120; *Superman* #252 VF $50; *Superman Annual* #7 F/VF $65; *Twilight Zone* #1 F/VF $60; *X-Men* #1 VG $1100, #7 FN $100, #14 VF $209, #15 VF- $196, #16 F/VF $90.

Bronze Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #135 VF/NM $53; *Detective Comics* #443 VF/NM $45; *Fantastic Four* #121 NM- $22; *Iron Fist* #14 FN+ $50; *Marvel Premiere* #15 VF $45; *Marvel Team-Up* #1 VF $70, #12 NM- $24; *X-Men* #100 F/VF $60.

Modern Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #300 VF/NM $60, #300 NM $85; *Uncanny X-Men* #134 NM $40, #141 NM $42.

Robert Letscher II
Key Comics
PO Box 5035
Mesa, AZ 85211
480-890-0055
ebay ID: KeyComics@hotmail.com

Greetings from sweltering Arizona where it's 95 degrees at night!

First off, I want to say that I was quite disappointed by the annual San Diego Comic-Con. It takes many hours to even walk through, at about a half-million square feet in size; yet surprisingly little of the show was devoted to actual existing comic books.

Instead, every movie house was promoting their next theatrical release or upcoming DVDs; or the dozens of booths hyping future toy, game, card, TV show, or comic-related projects, which may or may not ever actually be produced. Plus, all the shirts, prints, weapons, books, graphic novels, bobble-heads, figures, statues, calendars, pin-up girls, website-promoters, supplies, key-chains, posters, hats, photographs—

None of which helps a comic collector fill in the holes in his runs!

How I fondly remember the good ole days, years ago, when there were literally dozens of actual *comic* dealers from around the globe offering exciting and diverse selections of cool back-issue comics to the ravenous fans. And it will probably just get worse.

Now, I'll get off my soapbox and talk about the comic market, which is quite strong! It seems demand continues to build, for all ages and genres of back-issue comics. Here are but a few of our sales of **unslabbed comics** from recent months: *Young Allies* #5 VG/FN $500; *Avengers* #5 VG+ $80; *X-Men* #97 VF/NM $80, #100 VF/NM $100, #137 NM- $23, #140 VF $23, #141 VF- $25, #142 NM- $20; *Reform School Girl* FN $2550; *Defenders* #1 NM- $91; *Hulk* #340 NM $35; *Venus* #14 PR $44; *Witches Tales* #25 FR $70.

Here are a few samples of the **CGC-graded** books sold lately: *X-Men* #65 CGC 9.0 $100, #118 CGC 9.4 $51, #119 CGC 9.4 $46, #151 CGC 9.6 $26, #176 CGC 9.8 $30, #179 CGC 9.6 $25; *Punch Comics* #18 CGC 9.0 $650; *Spider-Man and Black Cat* #1 CGC 9.8 $40.

The market for comic production art continues to grow, and the prices are rising accordingly. Here are a few of the cover pieces sold lately from the **Jack Adler Collection**: *The Unexpected* #110 Approval Cover $150, #112 Approval Cover $130; *Forever People* #11 Approval Cover $130; *Superman* #247 Hand-Colored Cover $190, #247 Approval Cover $160; *Batman* #240 Hand-Colored Cover $200; *Swamp Thing* #1 Untrimmed Final Test Cover $350; *Jimmy Olsen* #119 Approval Cover $15; *Action Comics* #425 Hand-Colored Cover $225; *Strange Adventures* #211 Approval Cover $140; *House of Mystery* #180 Approval Cover (damaged) $130; *Witching Hour* #17 Approval Cover (damaged) $110; *Star Spangled War* #145 Approval Cover $120; *From Beyond the Unknown* #9 Approval Cover $120; *Mr. Miracle* #10 Hand-Colored Cover $225, #10 Approval Cover $130; *Our Army at War* #229 Hand-Colored Cover $175, #237 Hand-Colored Cover $155.

It is worth noting that the above mentioned art and comic sales do not include the obligatory shipping and

insurance fees, which add to the ultimate cost to the buyer. I anticipate a continued strengthening of the overall market, especially with all the comics-based movies that are in production. There are still plenty of bargains to be found, for collectors of all budgets, with a little persistence. Just as long as you don't insist on having the very finest! Best wishes and happy collecting!

John Paul
Comic Book Expo
Wayne, NJ / Clifton, NJ
10 Cross St, Montclair, NJ
PUGPRDCTNS@AOL.COM
973-**783-0608**

Well, it's summer here in NJ (and everywhere else north of the equator as well). Typically, attendance at our shows dips during the summer due to the overabundance of oceanfront shore hotspots our state has to offer. But our July show had even better attendance than our June show—go figure!

As is usually the case, high-grade Silver and Bronze Age Marvel and DC have been selling well, although we do see plenty of movement on low to mid grades as well. There has been a notable increase in requests for Neil Gaiman's comics. His new projects do seem to be generating interest in his older work. One would think that his being a best-selling "real" author would bring new collectors in, but that's not really the case. Readers who have discovered him through his non-comics work can and do buy the readily available TPB reprints in bookstores, while most of those seeking back issues at the shows are comics purists that missed the boat in the 1990s and want original format.

Esoteric comics from the Bronze Age and earlier are really picking up steam. Collectors for this type of material are definitely losing their grade obsession and are developing a buy-it-when-you-see-it attitude, especially when presented with a large amount at one time. One of our dealers picked up a collection that included three long boxes of oddball stuff and sold nearly two full boxes at just one (single-day, six-hour-long) show!

I have finally seen one of the comics graded by the "new kid on the block" grading company. It was in their budget holder and was already opening at the seams. The holder also did not offer much protection to the comic if mishandled. If collectors insist on third-party grading, a free marketplace and common sense dictate that there must be viable alternatives to CGC. Healthy competition is the best way to maintain integrity and reasonable cost to the consumer. One of our collectors who does occasionally buy CGC-graded comics online (and actually opens them and reads them) did bring up an interesting point at our last show. How valid is the CGC population report when it comes to Silver and Golden Age books?

Many dealers and collectors crack open comics that they feel are undergraded and resubmit them without the original label. As a result, these comics will appear multiple times on the report.

Do those two notorious Nicholas Cage comics appear twice on the report with two different grades?

Thousands of comics change hands at each of our shows. The following is a small sample of some of the more interesting sales.

Platinum Age: *Felix the Cat* Book (nn) GD $175; *When A Feller Needs a Friend* VG $75.

Golden and Atom Age: *Archie's Rival Reggie* #1 VG- $80; *Blackhawk* #65 FN $80; *Dodo & The Frog* # 81 VG/FN $40; *Doll Man* #1 GD $275; *Feature Films* #3 VF- $300; *Heart Throbs* #2 VG+ $50; *Startling Terror Tales* #13 FN+ $100; *Superman* #26 G/VG $200; *Tessie the Typist* #6 FN/VF $125; *Voodoo* (Ajax/Farrell) FN/VF $160; *Wonder Woman* #39 VG/FN $175.

Silver Age: *Adventures of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis* #22 VG/FN $40, #33 FN $30; *Adventures of Young Dr. Masters* #1 VF $25, #2 VF+ $20; *Amazing Spider-Man* #8 VG/FN $175, #14 VG $300, #51 FN $55; *Avengers* #4 VG/FN $325, #9 VG $45, #52 NM $50; *Batman* #232 VF/NM $110; *Beany and Cecil* #3 FN $35; *Brave & Bold* #37 VG+ $100; *Captain America* #113 VF $50; *80 Page Giant* #8 VG $60; *Gorgo* #4 FN/VF $40, #13 FN $20, #23 VF $35; *Justice League of America* #9 FN+ $150; *Korak* #1 VF $50; *Marvelmania Catalog* #2 FN $30; *Shadow* (Archie) #1 VF $50, #3 FN/VF $15, #4 FN+ $9; *Star Trek* (Gold Key) #1 (photo back cover) VG $100; *Supercar* #3 VF $75; *Tales Calculated to Drive You Bats* #1 FN $20; *Tales of Suspense* #40 GD $95, #50 VG $40; *Tales to Astonish* #59 VF $105.

Bronze Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #102 VF $45, #129 FN $75; Atlas/Seaboard lot of issues #1 & #2 (where one exists) of *all* titles (with the exception of teen and romance) VF to NM $5 per issue; *Cody Starbuck* (1st print) nn NM $25; *Conan* #1 VF $125; *Daredevil* #100 NM- $35; *Dennis The Menace* Comics Digest (Marvel w/DC logo) #1 VF $15; *Eerie* #1 (2nd print w/ blue staple stripe) VF $100; *Hansi, The Girl Who Loved The Swastika* (1973) VF $25; *Strange Adventures* #244 VF/NM $15; *Supergirl* #1 VF/NM $20; *Superman Family* #222 NM $15; *Superman's Girfriend Lois Lane* #106 VF $30; *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #134 NM $125; *Tarzan* (Marvel) #1 NM $5; *Twilight Zone* #92 VF/NM $12; *Wonder Woman* #200 VF+ $50.

Modern Age: *Action* #583 NM $15; *Battle For A Three Dimensional World* #1 NM $25; *Eightball* #1 (1st print) NM $15; *Fables* #2 NM $15; *From Hell* #1 (1st print) NM $25, #2 NM $20, #3 NM $15; *Marvel Super-Heroes Secret Wars* #8 NM $15; *Masters of the Universe* (Marvel) #1 NM $10, #11 NM $7, #12 NM $7, #13 NM $15; *Sandman* NM run #1-10 $50; *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* #2 (1st print) NM $50; *Trouble* #1 (1st print) NM $10; *V for Vendetta* complete NM set of #1-10 $20; *Ultimates* #2 NM $15; *Wonder Woman* #300 NM $10; *Y The Last Man* two NM Sets of #1-5 at $55 each.

Michael Tierney

Collector's Edition - North Little Rock, Arkansas
The Comic Book Store - Little Rock, Arkansas

It's been a busy summer, and not just in sales but in acquisitions as well! Several collections of Golden, Atom and Silver Age comics all came through the stores within the space of a couple of weeks, and all contained key books like early Marvel super-heroes and even the earlier prototype issues. Theater activity probably saved a couple of these collections from trash bins as comic-related movies have raised awareness in old comic collectors who are preparing to move to new residences.

One collection was a good example of how difficult it can sometimes be to educate people about the importance that condition plays in relation to a book's value. I had seen this particular collection of a thousand-plus Atom and Silver Age books twice before, and each time the seller had unrealistic expectations. He thought that I would pay him $19,000 for his *Hulk* #1. Like so many people, he'd looked at the Near Mint price in the *Guide*, and thought that he could just bring it into a comic book store and collect the money, as if he were cashing a check at the bank. Issues of profit margin aside, it took quite a while to explain to him about why I would (and later did) sell that same book for $900. The third time of teaching all this was the charm, and the seller finally began to understand the importance of condition.

Tragically, this was because the offer I made this time was *half* of the offer I'd made the last time I'd seen the books. He'd been keeping his childhood comics sitting unbagged in open cardboard boxes and in an unheated and uncooled part of his house. The acid in the pulp paper had activated and started turning many of the books tan and brown. Because of the paper quality some of his books, like the run of single digit *Hulks* which had once been Fine to Very Fine copies—were now only Good Plus. After he finally realized the importance of condition and that his books were deteriorating because of poor care, we came to terms. I'm certain that every comics retailer in America can relate other examples of this kind of story.

Silver Age Marvel sales: *Daredevil* #1 VG $375; *Fantastic Four* #2 GD $250, #3 GD $170, #26 VG+ $63, #48 VG $180, and Annual #3 NF $38; *Iron Man* #12 FN+ $19; *Incredible Hulk* #108 NM $47.75; *Journey Into Mystery* #82 VF $90; *X-Men* #2 VG+ $270, #6 VG $45, #9 FN $95, #15 VG+ $65, #21 VF $55, #40 VG $45, and #41 NF $18.75.

Silver Age DC Comics: *Batman* #197 FN+ $170; *Brave & Bold* #30 (3rd Justice League) VG+ $230, #35 (2nd Hawkman) GD $45, #42 (Hawkman) VG $36; *Detective Comics* #148 GD- $35.75, #212 GD $52, #229 GD+ $80; *Flash* #109 (2nd Mirror Master) GD- $35; *Showcase* #6 (2nd app. Spectre) VG+ $39, #29 (3rd Sea Devils) VG- $65; *Sea Devils* #1 (with another of those great wash covers) VG+ $89.75; and *Showcase* #57 (Enemy Ace) GD $21.

Bronze Age has also been brisk with movie related properties leading the way; *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 VG- #110; *Uncanny X-Men* #94 GD $60, #94 (2nd copy) FN+ $319, #97 VF $29.75, and #103 NM $39.

Golden Age and **Atom Age** sales were *Cisco Kid* #1 (1944) VG+ $42; *Journey into Mystery* #39 and #78 (prototype Dr. Strange) both in VG for $51; *Whiz Comics* #11 VG/NF $146; and *Worlds of Fear* #6 & #8 both in VG for $34. I've also sold three classic headlight comics: *Annie Oakley* Vol. 1 #1, *Blue Beetle* #47, and *Junior* #15, all in fair condition, for $129.

Those are a few examples of the great books changing hands this summer—and they are just the tip of the iceberg. Right now I have an embarrassment of wealth in great comics that I don't have space enough to display, with lots and lots of key issues coming from each collection purchased. Of the first three appearances of Ant-Man now in stock, each came from a different collection.

Just when you start to think that all the great collections hidden in attics and closets have already been found you go through a spell like this. With all the stacks of Nineties comics and disappointed faces that I'm forced to sift through on a daily basis. Times like this are pleasant rarities!

Scott McAdam

8418 Greenspoint Dr.
Rowlett, TX 75088
972-463-7011
smcatoyguy@aol.com
treasuresofyouth [eBay userid]

Here is another report from hot, humid, and stormy Texas. The powers that be of the San Diego Comic-Con International would love to drive all of us dinosaurs out of the field of comic collecting. If it was up to them, they would have toy companies; small press; media companies selling everything from Japanese porno video games to action figures that no one will care in about in five minutes; card companies that hype crap that will never amount to more than market manipulation and so many other abominations to this industry that I am puking as I write this paragraph. People come to buy old comics. The originators of the San Diego *Comic Book* convention must hate what has happened to their lovely creation.

Enough of *that* tirade. Old comics still sell and there is still a good amount of loyal vintage comic collectors ranging from the reader that wants them "Beat, but complete" to the High Grade people that want one just a little better than this Near Mint.

I participated in a "New Deal" at this year's Con. I came out as an employee of my friend and was given table, interior floor and rack space plus food and lodging as compensation. It worked wonderfully. I did quite well, selling art and comics for myself and my friend. Here are but a few **sales** that I can remember: *Western Action Thrillers* #1 [Dell 1937 100 pgs] FN+ $300; *Frankenstein Jr.* #1 [Gold Key 1965

The Naiman Report

[continued from page 72]

$17,825; Gil Kane and Tom Palmer *The Tomb of Dracula* #10 cover (Marvel, 1973) $17,250; Johnny Craig *The Vault of Horror* #40 cover (EC, 1954) $4,255; Harvey Kurtzman *Wildest Westerns* #1 cover (Warren, 1961) $2,300; Steve Ditko *Tales of Suspense* #42, complete 5-page story, "I Speak of the Haunted House!" (Marvel, 1963) $8,050; Lee Elias *Chamber of Chills* #11 cover (Harvey, 1952) $1,725;Bill Everett *Daredevil* #1, pages 8 & 9 (Marvel, 1964) $8,050; Al Feldstein *Weird Science-Fantasy* #28 cover (EC, 1955) $5,175; Al Feldstein *The Crypt of Terror* #17, complete 8-Page story, "Death Must Come" (EC, 1950) $8,625; Frank Frazetta "Girl and Lion" illustration (undated) $2,185; Frank Frazetta "The Hunter Out of Time" illustration (Ace Books, 1964) $3,220; Frank Frazetta Nude Woman sketch (1991) $3,450; Frank Frazetta "Battlestar Galactica" preliminary painting (1978) $4,140; Al Williamson *Valor* #3, complete 7-page story, "The Cloak of Command" (EC, 1955) $6,900; Al Williamson and Frank Frazetta *Weird Science-Fantasy* #20, complete 7-page story, "I, Rocket" (EC, 1953) $16,675.

The Market Report

[continued from page 76]

scarce] VF-/NM $250; Carl Barks Lithograph 1995 "Caliph of Baghdad" LE $250.

There were many other small sales that I cannot remember, but my feeling was that people were able and happy to spend money on their collections. It gave me, a true aficionado and self-proclaimed expert in the history of comics, a good feeling to know that the love of our past and one of the greatest recreational things to shape our future is still revered and respected by its loyal public.

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual [illegible] and collectors who contribute. Prices vary by location, date of [illegible]tion and other factors.*

The FRAZETTA-File

[continued from page 71]

Ringgenberg: After meeting him, how was Frazetta different than you envisioned him to be?

Laspina: Hmm. Well, it's funny. I guess this is one of the reasons that I wanted to film it. I had no idea what Frank was going to be like because I'd never seen him speaking or talking or moving around, anything like that, so you can just get a perception of what he's like through the book interviews and the magazine articles that you read on him. So obviously you have this heroic figure, at least I did anyway, of [this] larger than life character. And even the photographs I'd seen of him, he was such a good-looking guy and it seemed like he had everything going. He had all this skill and talent and was athletic, so I really had these…high aspirations and I would put him on a pedestal, and deservedly so. Actually I met him for the first time when I was about twelve years old. We took a trip to the museum. Ellie was there working that day and it was close to closing time and she said, "Well, if you stick around for fifteen minutes or so Frank's going to be picking me up and you'll get a chance to meet him." So of course we did. Frank came in and he was very humble and very quiet and reserved, which I guess might have taken me aback a little bit because I was expecting someone more outgoing and so forth, but that was my brief encounter with him at that age. And then when I finally got a chance to meet him again back in '99, again very humble. Now, it's hard to think back then, because now that I've spent so much time with him and we've become friends I see him mostly as…, I still see him as this great artist, but I see him as a friend and as a peer. But back then, it was like you're just amazed and you don't think you're worthy of being in his company.

Ringgenberg: He's one of the art world's most interesting characters. I'm glad you were able to record his life.

Laspina: The thing is, it would have been nice to have filmed him probably prior to '95 or so but I still think it was a good point in his life because we were able to capture the medical conditions and the fact that he's come back from all this and that's part of the theme of the documentary—the inspiration. Not only in the style of painting that has influenced countless generations of artists but also the fact that his perseverance is so unbelievable. And he's able to come back from the thyroid condition and from the strokes and he's taught himself to paint and draw left-handed. I mean that's been such an inspiration in itself. You don't even have to be an artist to appreciate that.

Ringgenberg: Okay, last question, Lance. What was the Frazettas' reaction to the finished film?

Laspina: I just spoke with Frank and Ellie last week or about a week and a half ago maybe, and they absolutely loved it They loved the film. The last version they'd seen was a year ago. And I was nervous about showing this one to them. They didn't like the last one as well and we'd made some changes since then. But Frank was just elated. He said it was just so well done and of course that was what I needed to hear, because part of our obligation as far as doing the film was to please the Frazettas—and especially to please Frank. And I really wanted to get this film done so he could see it, and the fact that he was able to sit there and enjoy it as much as he did really meant a lot to me because he's obviously given me so much in my life, it was a pleasure to be able to give him back something.

If you're intrigued enough by this interview to want to see Frazetta: Painting With Fire, *your best bet is to buy a copy of the VHS tape directly from Cinemachine. It's available for a reasonable $20 from the Cinemachine web site at www.cinemachine.net. The DVD, packed with extra features, will be available later in 2003.*

by Michelle Nolan

What's So Wonderful About It?

In that wonderful year 1954—what, you say 1954 was anything but a wonderful year in the history of comic books?

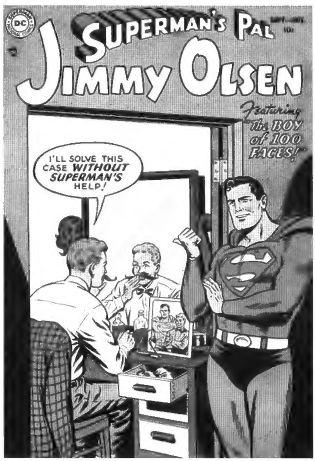
Well—yes. And no.

It was, to be sure, anything but wonderful for EC, which was on its last legs, thanks largely to the creation of the Comics Code Authority. And it was anything but wonderful for the publishers of crime and horror comics. They were struck a death blow in 1954 with the criticism the industry faced in the wake of the publication of Dr. Fredric Wertham's screed *Seduction of the Innocent* and ensuing Congressional hearings—several months before the Comics Code was formed in September by the Comics Magazine Publishers of America.

There were, however, still a huge—huge, mind you!—number of newsstand comic books published in 1954—2,719 to be exact, give or take a couple that may not exist. Many, many of them still had whopping circulations of a half-million or more. The pre-1990s record of 3,162 issues was reached only two years earlier, in 1952.

On the whole, the industry in 1954 was actually a lot healthier than it was only five years later, when only a little more than half as many comic books were published. In fact, at the dawn of the Silver Age, only 1,511 comic books appeared with 1959 dates—less than half the total of only seven years earlier. In one comic-book reading "generation," the popularity of the medium had been cut in half—and circulation probably fell by at least that much.

In my opinion, three factors—the dramatic rise in the popularity of television throughout the 1950s, ever-increasing comic-book distribution difficulties, and the economics of inflation and the lack of profits available with a 10-cent price point—ultimately did far more to hurt the comic book market by the end of the 1950s than the demise of crime and horror comics and the inception of the Comics Code in 1954.



In fact, using indefatigable indexer Dan Stevenson's issue-by-issue, year-by-year database, I surveyed all the comics published in 1954. Only 20 percent of the total—542 issues—could be classified as crime and horror comics, unless you want to count the violence inherent in western and war titles.

Wertham attacked those types, too, but by 1954 most of the western and war titles had already been considerably toned down.

Many of the folks who have written about comic books over the years have indicated that 1954 was a year of collapse. Considering the undeserved fate of EC and its line of superb graphic stories, the use of "collapse" is understandable, at least from an aesthetic standpoint.

Otherwise, however, "collapse" is far too strong to describe the state of the industry in 1954. Perhaps "in flux" or "confused" would be more accurate terms.

The cynic in me, though, long has believed that at least four of the five major comic book publishers in 1954, Dell, DC, Harvey and Charlton—along with the much smaller Archie folks, who produced only 68 comics in 1954 but sold a bundle of each—were delighted to see the inception of the Comics Code. Surely, those publishers knew the Code could only help them, especially by thinning out the competition. We all know how squeaky-clean Dell was, and DC and Archie were nearly so. And horror and crime comics were a small fraction of the Harvey and Charlton output.

The fifth major publisher of the era, Atlas/Marvel, produced dozens upon dozens of violent titles in 1954, but that company also may not have suffered much simply because of the creation of the Comics Code. Most of the Atlas horror and crime titles adjusted effectively to the Comics Code—Atlas publication totals actually rose from 379 comics in 1954 to 389 in 1955 and 431 in 1956, all tops in the industry—before the infamous implosion/distribution fiasco of 1957

meant the end of the Atlas logo and cut Marvel's output to eight titles per month in 1958.

The only historically important companies to go out of the funny book business in 1954 were Fawcett and Fiction House, and in neither case did the impact of horror comics or the Comics Code have anything to do with it (although Fiction House's cleavage-filled stories surely could not have survived the Code without considerable retouching).

The most significant non-EC last issue with a 1954 date was *Marvel Family* #89 (Jan 1954), which ties as the final Fawcett comic and marked the end of the Golden Age versions of Captain Marvel, Captain Marvel Junior and Mary Marvel. Fiction House, which published only pulps and comic books in the 1940s, did not enter the burgeoning paperback and men's magazine markets, and thus could not survive the collapse of the pulp market. Fiction House died a long, lingering death in 1953-55, with its final ten comic books appearing in 1954.

Comic Media and L.B. Cole's Star Publications, both minor players in the market but considered collectible today for their often-esoteric productions, also ceased publication in 1954. Star produced 48 issues that year and Comic Media published 40. The short-lived 3-D experiment also ended in 1954.

On the other hand, there were several significant first issues in 1954, all of which thrived in the post-Comics Code era. These included DC's *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #1 and *Our Fighting Forces* #1 along with the debut of Turok in Dell's *Four Color* #596.

Many fans will contend that the most significant comic-book event of 1954 was the first *World's Finest* teamup of Superman and Batman in #71 (Jul/Aug), which was the first regular-sized issue of one of DC's flagship titles. *World's Finest* was cut from a 68-page, 15-cent, saddle-stitched format, so the title could no longer carry full-length tales of both heroes without violating what was then DC's formula of at least three different stories in each of its comics.

The first post-Golden Age meeting of Superman and Batman occurred in *Superman* #76 (May/Jun 1952). Surprisingly, there were no other crossover tales for two more years until *World's Finest* #71, which some fans use to date the "real" beginning of the Silver Age.

On the contrary, I've always considered the first Silver Age comic to be *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #1 (Sep/Oct 1954). Granted, it was a pre-Code issue, and it was published two years before The Flash debuted in *Showcase* #4, but it was nonetheless a significant departure from the industry norm.

Jimmy Olsen #1 was the only successful super-hero title begun between *Superboy* #1 in 1949 and *The Flash* in 1959. There were more than two dozen short-lived super-hero revivals, rejuvenations and original concepts tried in that ten-year span, but nothing really clicked except for *Jimmy Olsen*. The reason, of course, was that the *Jimmy Olsen* title was closely aligned with the huge success of the syndicated Superman television show.

Our favorite cub reporter did not even appear in several of the 26 episodes of the show's first season, including the two Olsen-less episodes cobbled out of the short 1951 feature film, *Superman and the Mole Men*. Those 26 episodes were filmed in 1951 (even though not released until Feb 1953) and, with Superman radio producer Robert Maxwell in charge, the emphasis was on action, violence and drama. World-class screamer Phyllis Coates made an appropriate Lois Lane to go along with Jack Larsen, who was the only Jimmy Olsen in the show's 104-episode history.

When longtime DC editor Whitney Ellsworth went to Hollywood to oversee production beginning with the second season, the violence was dramatically toned down. Instead, the comedic element was played up, and an all-too-bumbling Jimmy Olsen took a much more prominent position. Meanwhile, the kinder, gentler on-screen presence of Noel Neill—who played the reporter in the 1948 and 1950 Superman serials from Columbia—took over the Lois Lane role for the last 78 television

episodes (26 in the second season, with 13 each in the third through sixth seasons).

By the time filming wrapped up in 1957 on *Superman*, the show was set for endless re-runs and Lois Lane received her own DC title in 1958 after tryouts in *Showcase* #9 and #10 in 1957. My guess is that had there never been a wildly successful *Superman* television show, neither Jimmy nor Lois would have received their own comics.

Superman, however, is only the second most fondly remembered television show of the 1950s. No. 1 is, of course, *I Love Lucy*, which first aired in the fall of 1951. Unlike *Superman*, though, *Lucy* was aimed more at adults than children, and it wasn't until Dell *Four Color* #535 (Feb 1954) that Lucy and her coterie first appeared in a comic book. The series was moderately successful, running 35 issues through 1962, but Lucy typified a growing trend—the licensed television comic—which was exploited primarily by Dell during the 1950s.

Today, though, not many 1954 comics are more eagerly sought after than the first four issues of *I Love Lucy*.

Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's short-lived self-publishing venture, Mainline Comics, began with four titles in 1954—*Bullseye*, *Foxhole*, *In Love* and *Police Trap*—but lasted less than a year. Likewise, Mikeross, a self-publishing experiment by Mike Esposito and Ross Andru, produced six comics in 1954 before expiring. Mikeross started with *Three-D Love* #1 (Dec 1953). The year of 1954, however, could not have been a tougher time for self-publishing experiments.

Many collectors rate *Fighting American* #1 (Apr/May 1954) from Prize (Crestwood) as one of their favorite '54 productions. In the year's oddest development, that marvelously satirical Simon and Kirby series, which ended in 1955 after seven issues, appeared concurrently for its first three issues with Marvel's grimly serious *Captain America* #76-78, a short-lived revival.

Book Review

by Russ Cochran

Ya say this year's edition of *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* has just come out when a whole new mother lode of minty Pedigree comics are found?

Or, it's six months before a new *OCBPG* is due and the dealers who are "in the know" suddenly start buying all your *Superman* comics with gorillas on the cover because Dian Fossey's biography is published?

Is that your problem, Bunky? Well, who you gonna call? Not Ghostbusters!

[Music up—"Stars and Stripes Forever"]

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[Music up—"William Tell Overture"]

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Bob Overstreet will, as you'd expect, oversee and evaluate all the pricing data collected by Tom Gordon, formerly of Monumental Collectibles, who will serve as managing editor of the newsletter. The rest of the Gemstone staff, again as you'd expect, will be in the trenches as well. From the humble origins of Bob's first *Guide* back in 1970, you've grown to trust the Overstreet name for prices you can be confident in. This time is no different.

Geppi concluded, "The extraordinary volatility the higher grades have shown is precisely the motivation for this new publication, which will quench our readers' thirst for accurate, rapid-fire sales information."

The first issue is out now. A one year subscription to the ***OVERSTREET'S COMIC PRICE REVIEW*** is $75, and orders can be placed by calling 888-375-9800 (ext. 410), or visiting www.gemstonepub.com/newsletter. Tell 'em the Old Professor sent you!

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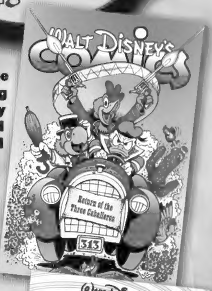

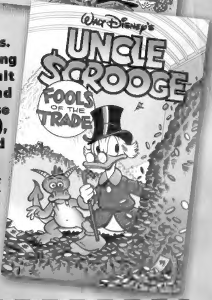

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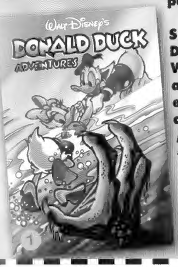

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